

SCREEN

INCORPORATING SCREEN EDUCATION



Volume 25
Numbers 4-5
July-October 1984
£5.00 \$9.00

**EXPLOSIVE
DOUBLE ISSUE!**

**TELEVISION:
FROM ACCESS
TO 'THE DAY AFTER'**

**CINEMA: FROM
HOLLYWOOD TO THE
KITCHEN SINK**

SPACE, PLACE, SPECTACLE

ANDREW HIGSON EXPLORES LANDSCAPE AND TOWNSCAPE IN THE 'KITCHEN SINK' FILM

¹ Barbara White,
'Interview with Walter
Lassally', *The Journal
of the University Film
Association (USA)*, vol
26 no 4, 1974, p 61.

² *ibid*, p 62.

³ J Krish, *SFTA
Journal*, Spring 1963
(issue on *The New
Realism In British
Films*), p 14.

... It was what was called the 'kitchen sink school', rather unkindly, I think, because the remarkable thing about *The Loneliness Of The Long Distance Runner* and *A Taste Of Honey* etc is not that they treat working class people, working class problems, but that they have a very poetic view of them. It's not at all a strictly realistic view. It's very much a romantic view, and that's what attracted me to them, I think.

Walter Lassally, cinematographer¹

I think it is nicer to create a romantic atmosphere (just so long as it isn't schmaltzy) than to create a strictly documentary realist one.

Walter Lassally²

Today people talk about a New Realism—a realistic realism, and that would mostly seem to cover swearing, talking about contraceptives, two people just up to the moment of sexual intercourse and *That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill*.

Comment in *Society of Film and TV Arts Journal*, 1963³

I WANT TO investigate what is at stake in these three quotations, in relation to the meanings and pleasures produced in a specific order of landscape and townscape shots in British 'realist' film-making. I refer to that tradition of 'quality' films from the 1930s documentary movement, through the Golden Years of the 1940s, and revived in the 'kitchen sink' cycle of films of 1958 to 1963 and certain other film and television material since. The term 'realism' is used because it is the key term in that discourse mobilised by contemporary critics and film historians alike to validate these films as the most worthy aspects of British film-making. The focus of the paper will be on that cycle of films between *Room at the Top* (directed by Jack Clayton, 1958) and *This Sporting Life* (directed by Lindsay Anderson, 1963). For reasons of space and convenience most of the examples will refer to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (directed by Karel Reisz, 1960)—hereafter *SNSM* and *A Taste of Honey* (directed by Tony Richardson, 1961)—hereafter *ATH*. This is not intended to be an exhaustive study of these films, but a consideration of their use of landscape and townscape shots in the context of their validation by contemporary discourses of film criticism—particularly the manner in which these various shots engage the attention of the

spectator in different and indeed contradictory ways, and produce a particular construction of the individual.

Landscape and townscape shots must at one level construct a narrative space in which the protagonists of the drama can perform the various actions of the plot. But more than a neutral space, these location shots demand to be read as a real historical *place*, authenticating the fiction. Yet the narrative compulsion of the film works continually to transform place once more into space. There is, however, a way in which this tension is transcended by the incorporation of landscape and townscape shots into and as the movements of the narration itself: place becomes a signifier of character, a metaphor for the state of mind of the protagonists, in the well-worn naturalist tradition. A further, and again contradictory, effect of at least some of these shots, where they cut against narrative meaning and flow, is to function as spectacle, as a visually pleasurable lure to the spectator's eye. This is particularly the case with *That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill*, which, as the third quotation above indicates, so rapidly becomes an iconographic cliché of this cycle of films.

Across this network of effects is a series of tensions which are brought out in the above quotations: the tension between the drabness of the settings (the 'kitchen sink') and their 'poetic' quality; between 'documentary realism' and 'romantic atmosphere'; between problem and spectacle. All novelistic forms have to accommodate both narration and description, both narrative movement to a new and different space and time, and the repetitive description of a single moment in space and time. In cinema, the image can both narrate and describe at the same time, but there is still a tension for, although the narrative system struggles to fix the meaning of an image, there is always *more* than the narrative can hold in place. As Stephen Heath puts it:

*Narrative never exhausts the image... Narrative can never contain the whole film which permanently exceeds its fictions.*⁴

The potential redundancy of the image, this 'something more', is not, however, wasted by Hollywood. While *mise-en-scène* is predominantly organised in the interests of clinching narrative significance, it is also developed as something fascinating in itself, a source of visual pleasure, a spectacle. The pull between narration and description is thus partly transformed into the pull between narrative and spectacle. Narrative – in part, the sense of something lacking, installing a desire to explore, to find out what is missing, to move onto a new scene, and the possibility of achieving what is desired, thus motivated by a voyeuristic curiosity. And spectacle – the spectator confronted by an image which is so fascinating that it seems complete; no longer the desire to move on, no longer the sense of something lacking; voyeurism blocked in a moment of fetishism.

British cinema, particularly 'realist' cinema, is not usually noted for its visual pleasure – hence the derogatory label 'kitchen sink' films. But clearly, at the same time, the image does still hold the eye – thus Las-

⁴ 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis', part I, *Screen* Spring 1975, vol 16 no 1, p 10.

⁵ Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses', *Screen* Summer 1974, vol 15 no 2, p 12.

⁶ Narrative in these films is *assumed*. It is noticed and commented upon only when it is a problem, when, for instance, it seems uneconomic: 'Taking a calm, level view, Richardson has straightened out and imparted narrative to his wry original.' (George Stonier, reviewing *A Taste Of Honey*, in *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1961, p 196.)

sally's notions of 'poetry' and 'romantic atmosphere'. In an attempt to discuss this contradiction in terms of voyeurism, fetishism and a concept of visual pleasure, it will be necessary to consider the idea of realism mobilised in relation to these films. Claims for realism are invariably multivalent, and certainly there are a number of conflicting assumptions underlying the claims for the 'kitchen sink' films as realist. These different assumptions produce at least three constructions of the visual in relation to such films: the visual as 'iconography', the visual as extraneous and obtrusive 'style', and the visual as 'poetry'. But initially, it is important to recognise that part of the realist claim is that these films are *not* different from the Hollywood film: a film like *SNSM* is still a narrative film, employing at least some of the 'classic realist' strategies outlined by Colin MacCabe and others in relation to the Hollywood studio film. The multiple discourses of a film like *SNSM* are hierarchically ordered in relation to the visible as revelation of the truth. This metadiscourse (this voice of narration, the camera-I) works to produce representation as presentation, and works to shift the attention from the production of representation to the content of the represented:

*The real is not articulated; it is.*⁵

But this 'classic realism' has never been enough in British film culture; there have always been other, more clearly argued, claims for the realism of the British 'quality' film as *different* from Hollywood's 'melodramatic fantasies'. Firstly, there is a claim for a *surface realism*, an iconography which authentically reproduces the visual and aural surfaces of the 'British way of life'. The 'authenticity' of place and character, for instance, is achieved in terms of breaking some of the studio conventions of dominant cinema – shooting on location in actual British landscapes, and using unknown, or unglamorous, or non-professional performers.

As such, surface realism involves a fetishisation of certain iconographic details, rather than their incorporation into a 'fuller' sense of *mise-en-scène*, or modes of narration and address, in other words, the *spectacle* of the real, as distinct from its narrativisation.⁶ But an authentic iconography in itself is not enough, and invariably there is a second claim for the realism of the British 'quality' film as distinct from 'Hollywood'. This we can name *moral realism*, in that it involves a moral commitment to a particular set of social problems and solutions, a particular social formation. Inevitably, it is in part bound up with the claim for surface realism, involving an iconographic commitment to the representation of 'ordinary people'; but it also involves a particular construction of the social in terms of 'universal human values'. It is that same demand voiced by the documentarists of the 1930s that films should show *the dignity of the working man*.

The concern for factual accuracy is thus gathered up in the desire for moral truth, focused on the figure in the landscape. A concern for personal relations and human values invests the landscape with a greater sense of moral urgency and a more compelling sense of human sym-

pathy, while the real historical landscape, local and concrete, legitimates and authenticates this moral universe. It is almost an implicit acknowledgement that narrative film is precisely *fiction*, and that it must therefore be made as credible and plausible as possible, by rooting the drama in history. This is something of an intensification of the classic realist strategies which can be used to make plausible an entirely imaginary world.

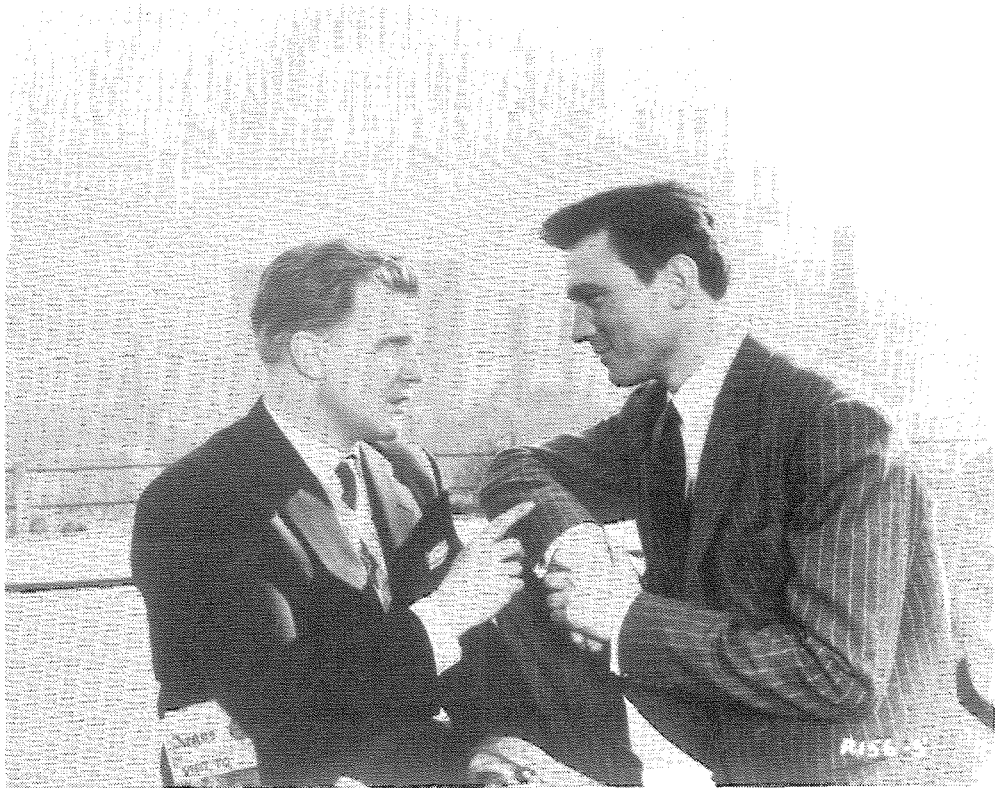
The moral force of this regime of representation is really a re-working of the sociological, propagandist strand in the documentary movement of the 1930s. With its rhetoric of social responsibility, of education and instruction, and its resistance to the more self-consciously aesthetic strand in the movement, it has left a residual sense of the *aesthetic*, the *stylistic*, as a problem in British film culture. Hence the sense of the visual as no more than an iconography, and *mise-en-scène* as a neutral vehicle for this 'content'. Hence also the construction of visual style as only self-conscious stylisation, as something extraneous, something tacked on to the 'organic text'.

But within the Griersonian discourses of the 1930s, there was always also an undertow running against the most ardently voiced educative-sociologistic strand, which sought to acknowledge and foreground the aesthetic work of the text. This we may call the discourse of *poetic realism*: it involves a more perfect conjunction of surface realism and moral realism, a conjunction which in fact *transcends* ordinariness, which makes the ordinary strange, beautiful – *poetic*.⁷ By the time of the 'kitchen sink' films, as can be seen from the quotations from Walter Lassally at the head of this paper, the term documentary realism is now assigned to the more prosaic renderings of surface realism and moral realism.

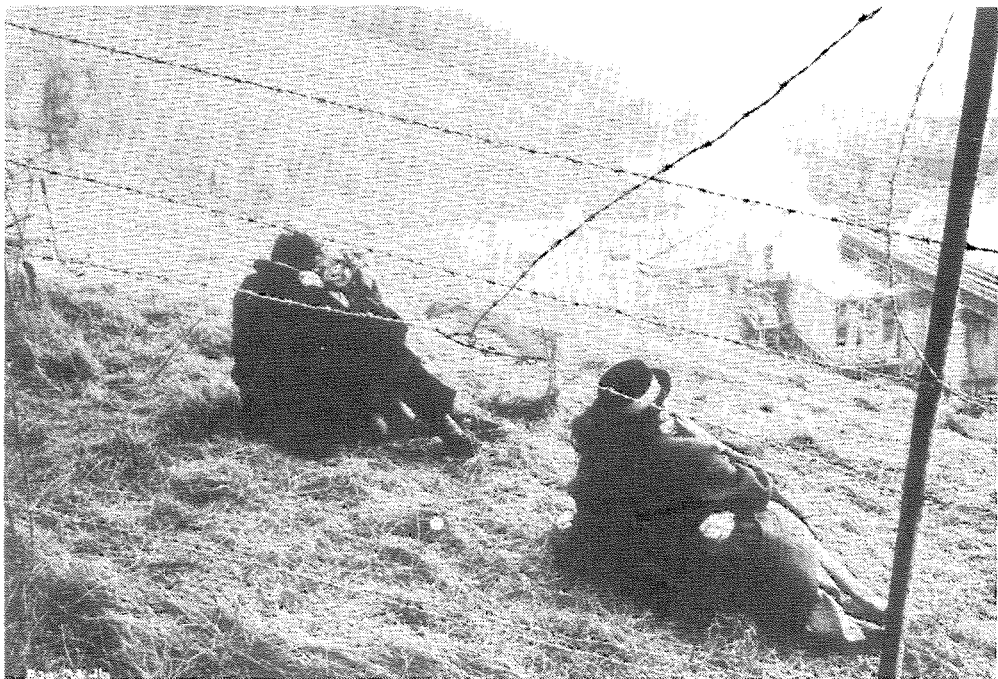
The strand of poetic realism in British film culture opens the door to a (guarded) valorisation of a self-conscious style in British 'realist' films (as in the case of the critical response to *This Sporting Life*, and to a lesser extent, *ATH*). At the same time, it also allows a (guarded) inscription of the artist in filmic discourse: the poetic film is a film of personal vision which foregrounds the work of the director. The Romantic tendency is however held in check by the continuing demand for moral commitment, but there inevitably remains a tension here between the sociological and the aesthetic, the moral and the poetic.

The rest of this paper will consider this tension in relation to the use of landscape and townscape shots in the 'kitchen sink' films. As already suggested, there is a general sense in which these films take place in actual locations in the urban-industrial areas of the Midlands and the North of England. But there is also a particular shot of the city to which these films insistently and obsessively return: it is That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill, a shot which lures the eye across the vast empty space of a townscape (the view from the bus stop outside Joe Lampton's lodgings in *Room at the Top*; the view from the parapet outside Nottingham castle in *SNSM*; the view from the hilltop park in *A Kind of Loving*; the view from the kitchen window of the flat rented by

⁷ It makes sense, then, that Humphrey Jennings is described by Lindsay Anderson as 'the only real poet the British cinema has yet produced.' ('Only connect: some aspects of the work of Humphrey Jennings', first published in *Sight and Sound*, April-June 1954, reprinted in *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet*, BFI, 1982.) Significantly, Anderson's own *This Sporting Life* was regarded by most of the British critics on its release as a poetic film.



Above, the view from the bus stop in *Room at the Top* and, below, from above the quarry in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. . .



Jo's mother in *ATH*; the view from above the quarry where Colin and his friends go in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, and so on...). In what sense can this set of images be incorporated into the narrative space of the film? It would seem that despite their coding in terms of the spectacular, they can still be clawed back into the narrative system of the films according to a logic of point-of-view shots and establishing shots. They offer an overall view shot of the city, establishing, economically, the overall space in which the action takes place.

For instance, at the beginning of the 'Sunday morning' section of *SNSM* (between the fight in which Arthur Seaton gets beaten up by the two soldiers, and his girlfriend Doreen visiting him at home in bed), a series of three shots move from a spectacular townscape (a view not seen before in the film) taken from a high camera position, dissolving to a high angle long shot of the back yards of two rows of terraced houses (which *could* be the back of Arthur's house), and finally cutting to an interior shot of Arthur lying in bed. At one level, this is an absolutely classical movement from the general to the particular within a scene. The first of the three shots is in this sense a conventional establishing shot, a form of the master shot. The movement from one image to the next rapidly impregnates the space, after each transition, with increasing narrative significance and dramatic purpose, until finally the individual is placed in his environment, the figure in the landscape. A logic of narrative motivation thus defines the space for the purposes of the fiction. At this narrative level, the initial townscape is not displayed simply to be looked at, but is caught up in a fiction which holds it in place.

Earlier in the same film, Arthur Seaton meets Brenda, with whom he is having an adulterous affair, on the parapet in front of Nottingham Castle. Behind them is a 'magnificent' view across the city, which, while it is at one level displayed as spectacle, is, at the same time, literally a backdrop to the action. Further, as the scene progresses, the view is increasingly integrated into the system of looks which make up the scene (as Peter Wollen puts it, 'protagonists appropriate the places they are "in"'⁸). The scene opens with the camera panning on Brenda's movement as she walks up to Arthur. Effortlessly, the view is offered to us as part of the narrative:

'I was just looking at the lovely view,' says Arthur (and indeed the view is spectacular, despite the chimneys, smoke and railway yards).

'Better come down to earth then, hadn't yer,' replies Brenda, calling Arthur, the spectacular view, and the film spectator back into the narrative, to confront the problems which face the protagonists (she brings news of a failed abortion). Clearly, then, space is being *used* narratively, it is being psychologised, since Arthur's position outside and above the problems of the city metaphorically represents his state of mind.

In the classical paradigm, the system for constructing space (the 'continuity style') has as its aim the subordination of spatial (and temporal) structures to the logic of the narrative, especially to the cause/effect chain. Negatively, the space is presented so as not to distract attention from the dominant actions; positively, the space is 'used up' by the presentation of narratively

⁸ Peter Wollen, 'Introduction: Place in the Cinema', *Framework*, no 13, 1980, p 25.

⁹ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, 'Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu', *Screen Summer 1976*, vol 17 no 2, p 42.

¹⁰ See Roland Barthes, 'The Realistic Effect', *Film Reader*, no 3, February 1978: e.g. '... by positing the referent as real and by pretending to follow it slavishly, realistic description avoids being drawn into a fantasising activity (a precaution believed necessary for the objectivity of the report)' (p 133).

¹¹ *Room at the Top* was sold as 'A savage story of lust and ambition' (publicity material, 1958).

¹² In *Film Language*, Oxford University Press, 1974, pp 18-20, Christian Metz distinguishes between narration and description, arguing that in the case of the latter, space exists outside time. It would seem more appropriate, however, to see narration and description not as separate entities, but as tendencies. Space in the fiction film can never exist wholly outside time.

¹³ Roland Barthes, op cit, p 131.

*important settings, character traits ('psychology') or other causal agents. Space as space is rendered subordinate to space as a site for action. . . .*⁹

However, the narrative system of a film is never as simple as Bordwell and Thompson's formalism would allow: there is always an undertow of meanings pulling against the flow of the narrative, always more than the narrative can use, whether it is in the form of the spectacular, or in the form of descriptively authentic detail. In the case of the latter, the novelistic demand for a certain accumulation of 'realistic detail' transforms narrative space into a *real historical place*, much of the detail of which is structurally redundant to the narrative. For example, at a simple level, a film such as *SNSM* is a classic melodrama of individual desire regulated by censorial social relations and responsibilities, and there is no structural necessity for the films to be set in the Midlands of England or to be shot on location.¹⁰ The machinery of criticism, promotion, selling, film memory, endlessly stresses the detail of location, but this a product of moral rather than structural (narrative) demands. Narratively, such films are about an individual's efforts to fulfil a wish or a series of wishes.¹¹ Morally, however, the significance of the film is not so much its story as the *reality* of its events. This emphasis on *place* in—or against—the narrative historicises the narrative, shifting it away from the particular, to a more general level of concern. But at the same time, place is used up by the narrative at a metaphorical level, as a 'geography of the mind'. This metaphorical work then turns back the historical onto the discursive, the psychological, the individual.

To return to the three shots which open the 'Sunday morning' section of *SNSM*: the initial townscape is on the screen long enough (thirteen seconds) for the spectator to scan this real place, to make some sense of the city as a city, to notice details of movement (a trail of smoke or steam), perhaps to examine the extent to which the landscape has been worked over and transformed by industrial labour under capitalism. It is a place with a history which might possibly be read off the image. But at the same time, the narrative always returns to make a *particular* sense of this multiplication of detail, to *psychologise* rather than *historicise* the space, to marshal it into a representation of a state of mind. It is a new day, the sun is shining, the urban-industrial image seems peaceful, stable, there are no immediate signs of work, of struggle: exactly—Arthur Seaton has turned over a new leaf in his life, and the geography, the *mise-en-scène*, is a sign of this change. Thus the townscape shot exists as a descriptive shot, a temporally unmarked space: this is a city (this is the city where Arthur Seaton lives). But it is also narrational, it is gathered up narratively and articulated now temporally: narrative *contains* descriptive sequences.¹² The image is caught up in a sequence of images which establish both an abstract or metaphorical time (the narrative sense of 'Sunday morning') and a specific time (the time when Arthur Seaton receives a visit from Doreen). The 'useless details'¹³ which fill out the view and which produce a 'realistic effect' are thus also *useful*, they are absorbed by the narrative and used up.

But clearly there is a tension in the image, a tension which is intensified by the moral demand that the spectator *investigate* the image, almost against the grain of the narrative. This moral obligation depends upon an empiricist ontology of the photographic image inscribed in the Griersonian discourses of the documentary ideal. This ideal institutes a particular mode of looking as observation, a belief that we can *see the real*, in images which document the social condition of the people who inhabit the landscape. It institutes at the same time a particular status of the image as denotative, as referential:

*Walter Lassally's photography [in A Taste of Honey], at times purposely rough and imperfect, has an immediate, direct sense of reality.*¹⁴

Place becomes a 'sign of reality': the implication is that it speaks a history, a memory. But always access to this history seems blocked. There is a resistance, for instance, to the representation of industrial (or indeed domestic) labour, obviously a major factor in the condition of the city.¹⁵ The landscape seems empty, except for the dominant *psychology* in the foreground, a psychology which is always much more the product of personal relations than economic relations. The fascination is with a *moral landscape*, hence the resistance to a historical reading of the landscape.

The form of this fascination becomes clearer if we look at some of the contemporary reviews of *ATH*, which describe the landscape in essentially emotional and aesthetic language:

*At last to one's delight, Tony Richardson's direction fulfils the poetic promise and avoids the technical pitfalls of Look Back In Anger and The Entertainer. . . . The film's real heroes are Mr. Richardson and his masterly cameraman Walter Lassally, who between them have caught Manchester's canal threaded hinterland to a misty, moisty, smoky nicety. And they have found unforced poetry . . . among the mist, the moisture, and the smoke.*¹⁶

*[A Taste of Honey] is memorable . . . for the air of naturalness with which the words have, so to speak, been taken out of a small stage set and put into the large, drab, yet picturesque hurly-burly of a Northern industrial town.*¹⁷

*Richardson has used the place and its objects as he uses people, moodily, lovingly, bringing beauty out of squalor.*¹⁸

What becomes clear from this critical reponse is the extent to which the film's *mise-en-scène* of the city is organised in terms of aesthetic pleasure, visual pleasure. But as spectators we can feel secure in our admiring gaze at these images because of the morality of their commitment to a particular subject matter. The beautiful tragedy (the 'beauty out of squalor') of these images serves to elicit our sympathy for a particular social condition, and our gaze is thus authorised (indeed we should note that the gaze is precisely *authored* by 'Mr. Richardson and his masterly cameraman'). For the London-based critics, films like *ATH* are a magic journey to the

¹⁴ Boleslaw Sulik, reviewing *A Taste of Honey*, in *Tribune*, September 22, 1961.

¹⁵ Even in *SNSM*, we really only see Arthur at the factory just as he is about to *finish* work, or have a break.

¹⁶ Paul Dehn, *Daily Herald*, September 15, 1961.

¹⁷ The *Guardian*, unsigned review, September 16, 1961.

¹⁸ Isabel Quigly, the *Spectator*, September 22, 1961.



Picturesque poverty: *Housing Problems*, 1935.

exotic working class places of the Midlands and the 'distant' North¹⁹: this is the Mass Observation tradition of 'an anthropology of our own people'. The otherness of the place and the people is potentially threatening, dangerously strange. But the images are also beautiful, picturesque: the poetic in British film culture is both beautiful and strange. The self-conscious aestheticisation of the landscape erases the danger, the traces of the otherness, rendering it an exotic and spectacular landscape like so many other landscapes with which 'we' are familiar. Of course, we are already familiar with this order of shots from the documentary movement, which has always since the 1930s tended to aestheticise work and the working class, poverty and struggle – indeed has aestheticised struggle out of the image. Slums, in this tradition, become seductive, fascinating: *vide*, for instance, the street shots in *Housing Problems* (directed by Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton, 1935) – visually fascinated, we can at the same time rest assured that our gaze is morally sanctioned.

The demand for moral realism is only completed when an individual consciousness centres our attention, a psychologically complex character who can develop morally, but who can also be developed narratively according to the 'universal human values' of bourgeois subjectivity.

Some more comments from contemporary reviews of *ATH*:

¹⁹ 'Place implies memory, reverie... the imaginary... Place also implies displacement, being elsewhere, being a stranger. Films are like imaginary journeys; the cinema is a magic means of transport to distant places. Places are functions of narrative (actions must take place somehow) yet the fascination of film is often with the places themselves.' Peter Wollen, *op cit*, p 25.

²⁰ Paul Dehn, *op cit*.

*Solely concerned with one another, they [the protagonists] make us deeply concerned for them...*²⁰

*You cannot and are not meant to draw any social conclusions, only human ones.*²¹

11

²¹ Isabel Quigly, *op cit.*

²² Alan Dent, *Sunday Telegraph*, September 17, 1961.

The aesthetic and the psychological thus block access to the social and the historical. But this immediately raises the problem of the relationship between character and environment, between the protagonists of the fiction, and the real historical conditions of the place which they inhabit. If we turn to the contemporary reviews again, we find a naturalist argument for the relationship of character and environment. Firstly, there is the question of authenticity, interest, commitment (the comments are again from reviews of *ATH*):

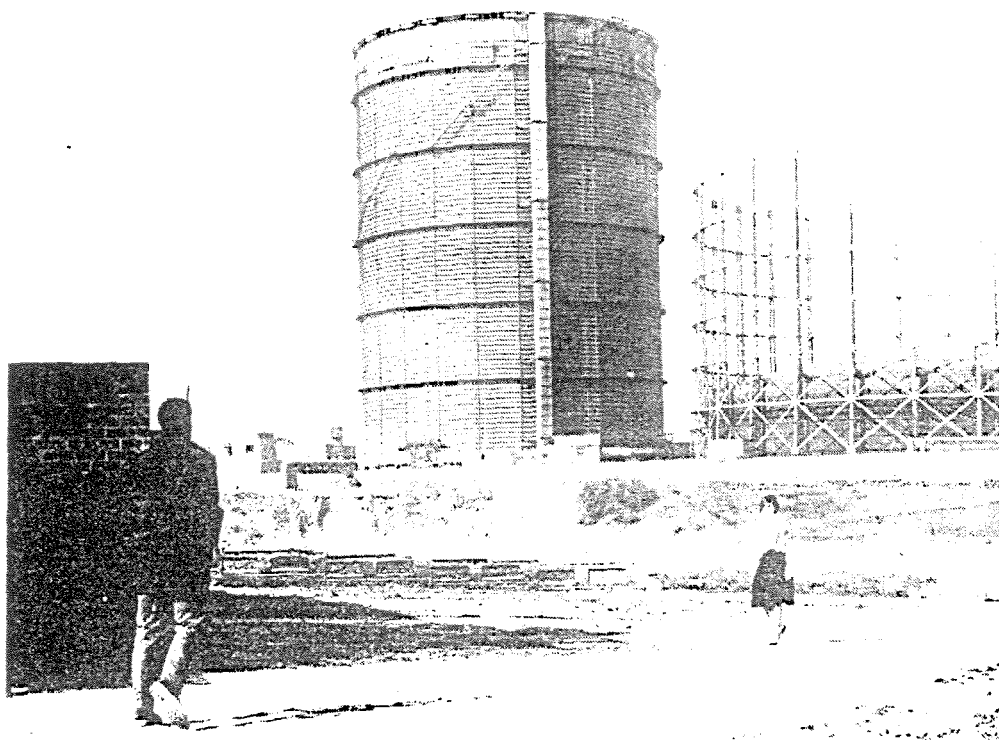
*The point of this brilliantly directed film is that it really does take us to Salford, steep us in such a town's way of life, and make us take a far deeper interest in the characters . . . than we could do in the play.*²²

Secondly, there is the naturalism of the figure in the city:

It is hard to imagine, if you never saw it on the stage, how it was ever anything but a film. Alleys, docks, churchyards, shopping streets, backyards, the canal, the sky, the weather, ships and buses and prams are all so intrinsic a part of its speech and action that it hardly seems they could have existed on



The seductive slum: *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1960.



Figures in the city: *A Taste of Honey*.

*their own between four stage walls. This, of course, is what a film ought to make you feel: that it was conceived in cinematic terms... people seen not isolated and spotlighted but belonging to a background that explains, enriches and illustrates them; objects and places seen as part of what happens, not props for the action, but integral parts of it.*²³

*Shooting largely on location [Richardson's] great achievement is to convey the fusion of people and environment. The characters are part of the landscape, as the landscape is part of them... this is in no small degree due to Walter Lassally's masterly photography of a land of smog and wet pavements, of lanes and factory chimneys and filth-throttled canals.*²⁴

This relationship of landscape and character is in effect psychological: it is not just that the character is *in* the landscape, but that the landscape becomes part of the character. Indeed, it is not enough to simply place the character in a *real* city – that reality must be used up by the character as a state of mind. It must be psychologised into a point of view, a subjective consciousness. There is in these films a narrative distinction made between the country and the city. Arthur, in *SNSM*; Jo in *ATH*, and Colin in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* are all metaphorically imprisoned in the 'squalid' city, and long for the 'freedom' and 'open space' of the countryside. As such the landscapes do not so much refer to real places outside the text as produce meaning *at the level*

²³ Isabel Quigly, *op cit*.

²⁴ David Robinson, *Financial Times*, September 15, 1961.

of representation, in terms of a system of differences: urban/rural, imprisonment/escape, the mass/the individual, social structure/bohemian fantasy, deferral of pleasure/wish fulfilment, the everyday/romance. At the same time there is a meaningful inter-textuality: in comparison with films from different genres and different national cinemas, there are a further set of binary oppositions: location/studio, contemporary/past-futuristic, English/international, poverty/wealth (also textually marked in *Room at the Top*). In relation to this country/city distinction, there are three sets of shots which need to be taken into account in these films: shots *within* the city, where we see the protagonist actually in the street; shots of predominantly rural settings; and That Long Shot of Our Town from *That Hill* – a sort of in-between stage, where we are outside and above the city, but where the city is itself prominent within the frame.

The city-dwelling protagonists of *ATH*, *Room at the Top*, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and *This Sporting Life* all go on trips into the countryside: in each case, the countryside is invested with a sense of romance, a sense of escape from the drudgery of everyday life in the city, a sense of what might have been (if only things had turned out differently).²⁵ But, in each case, there is also, finally, a curtailment of pleasure, a refusal to allow the individual to remain in this 'natural state' of wish fulfilment. The pleasure of the country is tainted by the memory of the city, and the necessity to return to it, or the return of the problems of the city to the figure in the country. Thus Jo and Alice in *Room at the Top* stay for a while at an idyllic cottage in the country, but know that they must eventually return to the city to face the consequences of their adultery; Frank Machin, in *This Sporting Life*, takes Mrs Hammond and her children out to the country in his new Jaguar, but almost as soon as she shows some unexpected happiness, we are returned to the city and the roar of the crowd at the sports stadium; Colin and his friends in *Loneliness*... are shown having a wonderful time at Skegness until their money runs out and they are forced to return to the city, feeling bitter and argumentative. In *ATH*, Jo, Geoff and a group of children (symbols of hope, the future) make a temporary escape from the city into the rolling hills outside. But the romance of the scene is an impossible one because Geoff is gay, and his unexpected advances to Jo on the hilltop are resisted as 'abnormal' in the context of their existing relationship (Jo has earlier defined Geoff as 'like a big sister...'). What is perhaps most memorable about the scene is its visual pleasure: the breathtaking rural landscape falling away behind them, the framing and the lighting of the shot. Similarly, in *SNSM*, there are two scenes at either end of the narrative where Arthur Seaton and his cousin Bert fish beside the canal. The published script describes it as 'a scene of utter tranquillity'²⁶ but it is much more complex than this: they are in a 'rural' setting, and hence by convention a tranquil one. But the signs of the city are still very evident. It is a canal (man-made) not a river; it is a very bleak, desolate place, and the factories are not far away. The two men are caught between country and city, just as are Arthur and Doreen in the final

²⁵ These semi-romantic rural scenes are in a sense a reprise of similar scenes in some of the melodramas of everyday life of the '40s. *Love On The Dole* (d John Baxter, 1941), *Millions Like Us* (d Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, 1943), and *It Always Rains on Sunday* (d Robert Hamer, 1947) all contain scenes where major characters are seen enjoying a temporary romantic idyll in a rural setting. The scenes function very similarly to those rural scenes in the later kitchen sink films.

²⁶ *Masterworks of the British Cinema*, Lorimer Publishing, 1974, p 281.



Between country and city: canal fishing in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*...

scene of the film when they look down from a grassy hilltop to a half built housing estate.

In each case, there is both a literal narrative motivation for the images of the rural (the protagonists do visit the countryside) and a metaphoric narrative motivation: the rural as pleasurable represents the fantasy wish fulfilment of the figure in the city (the individual who desires to escape). For these films are in part about the entrapment of the individual, who attempts to create his or her own space, and hence identity. This identity is very much defined in terms of escape, but it is an escape structured in relation to the individual: it is not open to a whole class. The dominant social theme of these films is the upward class mobility of the working class male youth, articulated at the same time as a sexual mobility. Where such mobility is blocked, there is a drift into a fantasy world (as in *Billy Liar*).

As such the 'kitchen sink' films are less about the conditions of the industrial working class and their collective class consciousness, than they are about the attempts of individuals to escape from those conditions and that consciousness, associated as they are with an older generation irredeemably tainted by mass culture. (Indeed, class difference has been displaced by generation difference as the basis for the organisation of consciousness and conflict in these films.) These films define individuality in terms of escape from the mass, the class, class consciousness,

into an individual consciousness.²⁷ In effect, this is an engagement with a psychological realism somewhat different to that of the classic Hollywood studio film, which tends to define characters in terms of action (for masculinity) of passion and/or the body (for femininity). But it is also the characteristic propensity of melodrama to internalise and psychologise ideological problems and conflicts (in this case it is an internalisation of the problems of a class under specific historical conditions). The two are held together in an attribution of bourgeois subjectivity to the working class, once more rendering their otherness safe: the feeling subject, sincere and meaningful, defined in terms of personal (not economic) relations, 'universal' human values, and with a familiar psychic investment (the two aims of Freud's family romance, eroticism and ambition²⁸).

The subject who desires to escape becomes the victim in the city, and a particular response is elicited from the spectator. It is the same response noted by Raymond Williams in relation to the naturalist literature of the late nineteenth century:

*an insistence on human sympathy just because the obstacles, the contradictions, the mysteries are so clearly seen.*²⁹

The construction of this subject can be seen at work in the images of the figure in the city, and, perhaps most acutely, in the shots which stand between the country and the city. The power of these is their capacity to represent both the extent to which the protagonist is trapped within the city, and the intensity with which he or she desires to escape. Thus a scene early in *ATH* opens with one of those shots from outside and above the city, looking across the city. The shot is retrospectively motivated as Jo's point of view: there is a cut to a second shot which shows her looking out of the kitchen window (at her mother's flat). The marking of this point of view is entirely absent from the initial townscape. In the metonymy of these two shots, Jo is constructed as precisely imprisoned *within* the city but desiring to get outside it. The first shot, although *of* the city, is outside and above it, and effectively represents the position which Jo desires. The second shows her as a small figure in the frame, in the literal kitchen sink *mise-en-scène* (beat-up old cooker, pans, the actual sink and draining board – all intentionally drab and uninviting), fixed behind the bars of the window looking out from an 'imaginary' vantage point, the figure of what might be, if only....

Unable to escape permanently from the city (caught as she is in a circle of personal relationships), Jo subsequently attempts to create her own space within the city, moving into a huge, ramshackle, barn-like room which she transforms into a privatised, individualised space. The montage sequences which deal with the transformation represent a celebration of this appropriation of space.

Surface realism and moral realism (which we can now note as a form of psychological realism) work over the text of classic narrative realism to produce a compelling sense of the urban figure as part of and produced by the city. Space and place together are absorbed metaphorically into

²⁷ See Raymond Williams' discussion of naturalist writing about the figure in the city in the late nineteenth century: 'For the sense of the great city was now, in many minds, so overwhelming, that its people were often seen in a single way: as a crowd, as "masses", or as a "workforce".' And, 'under the stress of this experience the problem of the individual and society acquired... a new and bitter dimension. The individual was the person who must escape, or try to escape, from this repulsive and degrading mass.' (*The Country and the City*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1973, p 222).

²⁸ See Sigmund Freud, 'Family Romances', in *On Sexuality*, Pelican Freud Library, vol 7, 1977.

²⁹ Raymond Williams, *op cit*, p 234.

the weave of the narration. But this organic fusion of character and environment is troubled by the spectacular construction of the townscape shot. The problem is essentially one of the form of the gaze offered to the spectator, and the status of the points of view constructed. The city, apparently a place of poverty and squalor, becomes photogenic and dramatic. In becoming the spectacular object of a diegetic and spectatorial gaze – something precisely ‘to-be-looked-at’ – it is emptied of socio-historical signification in a process of romanticisation, aestheticisation (even humanisation). This production of the city *as image* undercuts the moral sanction which authorises our gaze at it, and at the same time tends to *separate* the protagonist from the space which defines it.

This is a problem noticed by those critics of the period who were less bound to a moral vision which might validate the gaze – and which, indeed, might validate the whole cycle of ‘realist’ films. For it is at this same period, in the early 1960s, that the auteurism of *Cahiers du Cinéma* finds a voice in British film culture in the form of the magazine *Movie*. Here, iconography is incorporated into a fuller sense of *mise-en-scène*, and a more structural (rather than moral) conceptualisation of the ‘organic’ relationship between protagonist and setting. The concern of the *Movie* writers is predominantly aesthetic, the problem of the relationship between character and environment worked through at the level of narrative and *mise-en-scène*; no longer is it a worry about authentically historicising the characters:

³⁰ V F Perkins, ‘The British Cinema’, *Movie*, no 1, 1962, p 5. See also Peter Graham, *The Abortive Renaissance: Why Are Good British Films So Bad?*, Axle Publications, London, 1963.

³¹ See Thomas Elsaesser, ‘Between Style and Ideology’, *Monogram*, no 3, 1972, p 5; also the comments by Patrick Keiller on *Long Good Friday* in ‘The Poetic Experience of Townscape and Landscape, and Some Ways of Depicting It’, *Undercut*, nos 3–4, March, 1982. It is also worth comparing this use of iconography in the kitchen sink films to Hitchcock’s quite different use of place which demonstrates, as Mark Rappaport has argued, ‘how place becomes an element in the narrative that is so closely integrated, so linked, that the dramatic conclusion is achieved through the place rather than psychological interaction.’ (‘Mark Rappaport on Place’, *Framework*, no 13, 1980, p 27.)

*Richardson, Reisz, Schlesinger and Clayton are weakest exactly where their ambitions demand strength: in the integration of characters with background. Because of this weakness, they are constantly obliged to ‘establish’ place with inserted shots which serve only to strengthen our conviction that the setting, though ‘real’, has no organic connection with the characters. So Richardson tarts up A Taste of Honey with his street games. And Schlesinger landscape mongers in the most inept fashion.*³⁰

This line of criticism underlines the weakness of the narrative motivation of those cityscapes discussed in *SNSM* and *ATH*; the problem is the extent to which a simple iconography (The Pub, The Street, The Fairground, The Canal, etc) is used to establish the moral authenticity, the ‘reality’, of a place. They stand in the text as conventional ‘signs of reality’, unable to be fully absorbed into the narrative action.³¹ In the case of the scene on the castle parapet in *SNSM*, for instance, there is no necessary narrative reason for the meeting to take place here, and dialogue references and point-of-view shots can only weakly use the place for the drama. It is in effect a form of tourism.

What is at stake in this ‘problem’ of the disjunction of character and place is the uncertainty, the potential incoherence of point of view. The kitchen sink films posit, as their organising consciousness, the point of view of the central character inhabiting a ‘full’ environment. This is established in terms of the narrative centrality of the characters (spatial point of view), the use of optical point-of-view shots, but also the inscription of various forms of interior monologue (spoken in voice-over in

SNSM; visualised in flashbacks in *The Loneliness...* and *This Sporting Life*; and in daydreams in *Billy Liar*—and, in a different way, in *ATH*).

Any film which, like these kitchen sink films, works more or less within Hollywood's classic system of narrative construction risks a lack of fit between the 'subjective' looks of characters within the diegesis, and the 'omniscient' look of the camera (and spectator) from outside it. The strategies of classic realism struggle to efface the latter enunciative look by, in effect, mapping it on to the enounced looks of characters within the diegesis—but always there is the danger of the enunciative look insisting its presence on the spectator, threatening the imaginary contract between spectator and text. It is this risk which finally and acutely problematises the vision of the kitchen sink films: the overwhelming 'visibility' of a certain order of enunciative looks troubles the coherence of a film which is organised around the point of view of the central protagonist. Hence the sense of doubt which lingers over the status of *That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill*. The problem can only finally be contained by a naive auteurism ('Mr. Richardson and his masterly cameraman Walter Lassally') and the 'transcendentalism' of poetic realism, which, as I have already suggested, rests somewhat uneasily alongside the otherwise empiricist ontology of the photographic image.

This instability of point of view, and the 'visibility' of an authored, enunciative look, exist in a particular form in the kitchen sink film. It is the problem of the irreconcilability between an 'internal' point of view of the figure in the city, the working class victim (which corresponds to those shots *within* the city) and the 'external' point of view from outside and above the city, the look of the master-cameraman, the sympathetic gaze of the bourgeoisie (which corresponds to *That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill*). It is at the same time the gap between a moral commitment (a desire for sociological and historical knowledge) and an authorial mastery of aesthetics (a love of spectacle, a desire for cinema). Poetic realism as a loosely articulated discourse can only struggle to hold the two ends together, to produce a coherent point of view.

We can also relate this dichotomy to the split in the documentary movement between those instructional films which stand back from their subject matter and offer a public, social gaze at a place, a process, a people; and, on the other hand, the story documentary which begins to individuate characters within the diegesis, to emphasise psychological realism, and to offer a private, personal look from the point of view of an individual member of 'the people', from within the place that he or she inhabits.

The spectator of the kitchen sink film is in a privileged position, privy both to the interior monologue of the figure in the city, and to the master-shot, the all-embracing view of the city from the outside. This position of visual mastery is also a position of class authority, which relates back to the authority of the voice-over in an instructional documentary such as *Housing Problems*; where the middle class professional, the expert, guides our view of the working class as victims of slum housing. It is a position of mastery to which the working class protagonist of the kitchen

³² The *Times*, unsigned review, April 24, 1961. It is perhaps not so strange that the Victorian city should seem visually pleasurable. See Nicholas Taylor, 'The Awful Sublimity of the Victorian City', in H J Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds), *The Victorian City, Images and Realities*, vol 2, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973. He argues that the public and industrial buildings of the era were designed according to the aesthetics of the Sublime, inspiring 'the strongest emotions' of awe, terror, astonishment, magnitude. Significantly, the formal categories of the Sublime, as outlined by Taylor, correspond in most respects to the formal categories of the spectacular developed above. We can then suggest that it is only by standing outside the city and re-constructing a Sublime vision (as in the kitchen sink films) that the city can become once more visually pleasurable. (I am indebted to Mick Eaton for pointing out to me the relevance of this argument.)

³³ Nina Hibbin, the *Daily Worker*, October 16, 1961.

³⁴ 'Narrative Space', in *Questions Of Cinema*, London, MacMillan, 1981, p 30.

³⁵ *ibid.*

sink film has only a limited access: it is, as we have seen, the position to which the victim-who-desires-to-escape aspires.

It is only from a class position outside the city that the city can appear beautiful. *The Times* reviewer, for instance, writes:

*What strikes the spectator about a film like Saturday Night and Sunday Morning or Room At The Top is not so much the drabness of the back-grounds as their astonishing pictorial quality. . . .*³²

To its inhabitants, however, the city can only be a problem: for the victim who desires to escape there could be no other view. And indeed, the reviewer of the *Daily Worker* (although in most other respects within the dominant moral discourse of British film criticism) adopts a position of identification with the urban working class figure and produces a quite different reading:

*[ATH] was filmed entirely on location, and the camera searches out grimly and bleakly the crumbling exteriors of the Manchester slums with their broken down buildings humped up each side of a dirty backwater canal.*³³

The victim in the city and the masterly cameraman; the vulnerability of the subject and the authority of the look; the city as problem and the city as spectacle: it is only in the discourse of poetic realism that the difference can be held together. It is only the figure of the author which can accommodate both a moral fascination with otherness, and a strange but beautiful imagery. A simple visual pleasure in the images of the city would on its own be reprehensible: lacking a moral validation, the sadism involved in looking at the victim in the city, captured in the masterly photography, would be revealed.

That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill involves an external point of view, the voyeurism of one class looking at another, an identification with a position outside and above the city; it is, in the words of Stephen Heath,

*an identification with the camera as the point of a sure and centrally embracing view*³⁴,

an identification which is produced in a particular perspectival system, wherein

*space [is] set out as spectacle for the eye of the spectator. Eye and knowledge come together; subject, object, and the distance of the steady observation that allows the one to master the other. . . .*³⁵

That Long Shot, as an image, is organised precisely as spectacle: it depends upon (but disavows) a huge distance between subject and object, it situates the spectator in a privileged vantage point. But the moral insistence of the critics is on the coming together of eye and knowledge, the capacity of the documentary image to yield empirical knowledge to the eye of the spectator as observer. At the same time this impartial view is blocked in the construction of the image as a spectacle for the

eye of the spectator as master (as one of the critics noted of *ATH*: 'camerawork beguiling the eye'³⁶).

That Long Shot in the kitchen sink film is a play on the constituents of spectacle (of cinema) itself: its *mise-en-scène* is organised around the twin poles of presence/absence (the photo-effect)³⁷, around the paradox of the sure and centrally embracing view and the overwhelming vulnerability of the subject. Questions of framing, of extreme compositional contrast, of spatial scale, and of clarity of vision form the concrete processes of the spectacular.³⁸ The framing of That Long Shot characteristically requires a very high camera position (That Hill...) with an undifferentiated mass of houses, factories, chimneys, falling away from the point of vision. Sometimes this point is marked in the frame—the edge of a street, a window sill, a castle parapet—thus setting up an extreme contrast between the security and specificity of the point of vision and the awful vastness and generality of the city below. At other times, the point of vision is unmarked in the field of vision, underlining the sense of an omniscient shot (it is almost an aerial shot, although it is always static). In both cases the *scope* of the vision, the (near) perfection of the vantage-point is stressed: spectator and cameraman are masters of the world below.

Although the camera position itself is high, the angle of the shot remains level, and characteristically one half to two thirds of the frame consists of sky. Obviously spatial scale, framing and composition cannot easily be distinguished, but we can note, in addition, a certain monumentality of the view, particularly in terms of the distance of the vision, the depth of field: at once, that sense of the fulness, the completeness of the vision (its overwhelming presence) and its sense of absence, emptiness: it is almost an empty field of vision. This sense of grasping an infinite view but knowing that it is intangible, out of our reach, absent, is further stressed in the relation between the clarity and the obscurity of the view. There is always a certain haziness to the long shot—whether it is a mist, or smog, or clouds, or factory smoke. This haziness masks the image, but in so doing suggests the infinity of the space, and the (im)possibility of the gaze encompassing the infinite.

As Steve Neale argues, spectacle is a specific evocation and satiation of the scopic drive,

*a system which is especially concerned... to stress, to display, the visibility of the visible... All these forms of codification [framing, spatial scale, clarity of vision, etc] are designed to exhibit the image for the gaze of the spectator and for the scopic drive that sustains it, designed precisely to 'catch' (to lure) the eye.*³⁹

Spectacle inscribes the desire to look in the image itself, but it also inscribes 'the flaw at the heart of the scopic drive'⁴⁰, for the panoramic shot is, as we have seen, both full and empty at the same time. On the one hand, the spectator is placed at the 'perfect' vantage-point, a position of visual mastery, offering the possibility of gazing at the infinite; on the other, this mastery is continually headed off by the reassertion of narrat-

³⁶ William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, October 15, 1961.

³⁷ See John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.

³⁸ See Steve Neale's extremely useful article 'Triumph of the Will—Notes on Documentary and Spectacle', *Screen*, Spring 1979, vol 20 no 1, pp 63-86. Much of my subsequent argument depends on a reading of this article.

³⁹ *ibid*, pp 66-67.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p 67.

ive movement, and the interruption of our gaze by the gaze of another. The spectacle is, finally, caught up in the system of looks which traverse (construct) the diegesis of the film: it is no longer *our* vision, but the vision of a narrative protagonist, or the space of their actions. As we have seen, certain of Those Long Shots already have an edge within the field of vision: they mark the vantage-point as within the space of the film. they bind the spectating subject into the diegesis – and thus mark the vision as *finite* (as lacking, as flawed).

The initially unmarked shots are more disturbing: they seem to offer a perfect, omniscient view, both to the authoritative class outside the city and to the spectating subject. The view is offered initially for the spectator alone – as in the first shot of the ‘kitchen window’ sequence in *ATH*, and in the first shot of the ‘Sunday morning’ sequence in *SNSM*. In both cases, the shots seem at first unmotivated – and their occupation of screen time seems inordinately long: it is absolutely the spectator who becomes the subject of the look. The shots can only be narratively motivated in retrospect, as we have seen, and even then they characteristically reside behind moments of narrative pause, or minor incident, or inconsequentiality. But still, the narrative does, finally, muster up a use for an image that runs the risk of being a gratuitous spectacle; it does finally insist on the flaw in the vision, and provide a metonymic narrative reading of the image in order to fill the lack, or at least turn the attention away from it.

The spectator of the fiction film is caught in an anxious, precipitous frame of mind; concerned only with what’s next, the demand is for a narrative processing of the images, an ordering which will yield the satisfaction desired by the voyeuristic look. But when the image is coded in terms of the spectacular, this voyeuristic look is blocked in a moment of fetishism: a gaze which is fascinated by what it sees. The weak enigmas, and the episodic structure of the kitchen sink films, however, demand a less intense voyeurism: indeed, narrative curiosity is displaced onto a documentary inquisitiveness, a demand for the knowledge-effect of a documentary mode of observation.⁴¹ The curiosity is less in the metonymic movement of the narrative than it is in the conditions of a particular place at a particular time, as experienced by a particular individual, consciousness, state of mind. It is a humanist fascination with a particular social condition, which is in the end a fascination with a generalised ‘human condition’.

But this mode of observation is, still, a form of voyeurism, the product of the moral insistence of the realist discourse – and it is still blocked by the fetishistic mode of looking instituted by the spectacular. It is a mode of looking which prohibits investigation:

*The fetishistic gaze is captivated by what it sees, does not wish to inquire further, to see more, to find out.*⁴²

The problem for the kitchen sink films is that the documentary ideal requires a quite different mode of observation to that brought into play by the spectacular, as Steve Neale argues:

⁴¹ See Annette Kuhn, ‘The Camera-I: Observations on Documentary’, *Screen* Summer 1978, vol 19 no 2, pp 71-83.

⁴² John Ellis, *op cit*, p 47.

⁴³ Steve Neale, *op cit*, p 85.

⁴⁴ Leonard Mosley, *Daily Express*, October 15, 1961.

⁴⁵ Raymond Williams, *op cit*, p 226.

⁴⁶ John Ellis, *op cit*, pp 50-51, has argued

*Spectacle is content neither with simply rendering visible the observable, nor with inscribing the spectating subject simply in position as observer. It is much more concerned with the processes of rendering visible and looking themselves. What counts in spectacle is not the visible as guarantee of veracity (of truth, of reality) but rather the visible as mask, as lure. What counts is not the instance of looking as observation, but rather as fascinated gaze.*⁴³

The *moralism* of the realist discourse in British film culture must be able to accommodate on the one hand a *repression* of the fascination, the visual pleasure, of the imagery, in an ontology which allows the image of a place to articulate an unmediated history of that place; and on the other hand, an *acknowledgement* of the visual pleasure in terms of the 'beauty' of the strange, the other. Poetic realism at once represents and *transcends* the ordinary, the mundane, the *uninteresting*. And it also produces the working class figure as 'the victim in the city', who elicits sympathy from the morally committed spectator:

*A sordid tale? Somehow it is not. Somehow [A Taste of Honey] is touching, uplifting, heartwrenching and very funny in turns.*⁴⁴

In many ways, these kitchen sink films are comparable to the naturalist writing of the late nineteenth century, which, as Raymond Williams notes, is:

*a way of seeing which has been praised for its naturalism and its apparent exclusion of self conscious authorial commentary. The real point is that the 'commentary' is now completely incorporated; it is part of a whole way of seeing, at a 'sociological' distance.*⁴⁵

The same is true of the kitchen sink films, with the rider that *That Long Shot* is a betrayal of authorship (and a betrayal of the class position of that authority as outside the city and the consciousness of its inhabitants). The distance in *That Long Shot*, between the vantage-point of the subject and its ostensible object, the city, is at the same time a representation of the distance between the classes. From the class outside the city, the city is unknowable, impenetrable. But in constructing the shot as spectacular, the distance is disavowed; the impenetrability of the real living city is transformed into a surface, a representation, an image which does not need to be penetrated, but which can be gazed at precisely as image: the fascinated, fetishistic gaze.⁴⁶

Townscape and landscape: space, place, spectacle.... The terms indicate the imbalance of the kitchen sink films as they try to hold together the documentary ideal and a desire for cinema. It is a risk which disturbs the whole tradition of British 'realist' film-making and it is perhaps only in some recent 'independent' films that the question has been seriously confronted of how cinema might investigate a landscape historically⁴⁷.

An earlier version of this paper was read at a day school on Narrative and Cinema, Phoenix Arts Centre, Leicester, October 2, 1982.

that: 'cinema presents something that contemporary audiences will recognise as "the real" under a spectacular guise.... We say it is so real (not just it is real), revealing the fetishistic tinge to the desire to investigate reality. We are fascinated by the fact of portrayal itself: the image captivates us and holds us. The very fact of desiring to see reality from the position that entertainment cinema provides (secure separation) brings with it a sense of the spectacular, the marvellous nature of what is being seen, a fetishistic undertow.' British 'realist' cinema, with the forcefulness of the moral discourse which surrounds it, may intensify these processes.

⁴⁷ A number of articles have broached this theme, for instance, Luke Gibbons, "'Lies That Tell the Truth": Maeve, History and Irish Cinema', *Crane Bag*, vol 7 no 2, 1983, pp 148-155; Simon Watney, 'Gardens of Speculation: Landscape in The Draughtsman's Contract', *Undercut* no 7-8, Spring 1983, pp 4-9; Jane Clarke, 'So That You Can Live, I', and Sue Aspinall and Mandy Merck, 'So That You Can Live, II', *Screen* Sept-Oct 1982, vol 23 nos 3-4, pp 153-160. A key film in this respect is *Darkest England* (directed by Mick Eaton, 1984), which in part explores the idea of a moral landscape as the background to narrative, in relation to the Victorian industrial city.

'VICTIM': TEXT AS CONTEXT

BY ANDY MEDHURST

¹ Barbara Klinger, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism Revisited: The Progressive Text', *Screen*, Jan-Feb 1984, vol 25 no 1, p 44.

² Alan Sinfield, 'Four Ways with a Reactionary Text', *Literature Teaching Politics*, no 2, 1983, p 93.

³ Andrew Higson, 'Critical Theory and "British Cinema"', *Screen* July-October 1983, vol 24 nos 4-5, pp 80-95. See also Vincent Porter's letter and Higson's reply in vol 25 no 1, pp 86-88.

⁴ I agree with recent theories of sexuality which would see homosexuality as an historical construct rather than an essentialist quality, but it is nonetheless an historical construct within which many people, myself included, live, and as such open to analysis. I should also state that

The relation of text to context is decisively important to a theoretical and critical construction of the cinema/ideology relation.¹

Locating the text specifically lays it open to question. It also encourages us to perceive it on the level of everyday political strategy, which is where our own interventions must be conceived.²

IN THE STRUGGLE to establish itself as a distinct and dynamic body of knowledge, film theory in the 1970s made enormous gains. It achieved a radical break from the varieties of crude determinism and lavish aestheticism that occupied positions of dominance, but, as in any struggle, there were also losses. Most regrettable among these was any sense of the film text as social object. In order to gain more rigorous insights into their internal workings, texts were wrenched out of history, given autonomy, cast adrift from context into a sea of signficatory interplay which need never be referred back to the historical specificities of the moment of production.

That situation is now, thankfully, in the process of changing, but it is still necessary to stress the social dimensions of texts to prevent a slipping back into extremes of formalism or idealism. Such a slippage was recently evidenced in the pages of *Screen* in Andrew Higson's article on recent work in British cinema³, and so in the belief that no reputable study of a text can be made without a detailed consideration of the cultural, historical and social formations operative at the moment of its production, I want to use a British film as a case study in proving the necessity of looking beyond the confines of the text itself. The film I shall be looking at is *Victim* (1961), the first British film to centre its narrative around male homosexuality, and I want to consider it in relation to two broad problematics: conceptualisations of homosexuality⁴

and British film culture's general attitudes to sexuality at that time. First, some prefatory remarks on critical approaches to British cinema:

by 'homosexuality' in this article I am referring only to male homosexuality.

23

Methodology, 'Sociology' and British Cinema

It was, I suppose, inevitable that the recent and long-overdue rise in critical engagement with British cinema would resuscitate the methodological controversy over the application of 'sociological' models in film analysis. Text-centred film theory has always used 'sociological' as a term of abuse, and British cinema has always been superficially excavated by sociologists and historians in search of data. Thus a social historian like Arthur Marwick can use film texts as pieces of bald, simple 'evidence' of particular social trends.⁵ Such a process is absurdly reductive, displaying a total disregard for textual complexity and contradiction. On the other hand, works of great distinction, like Charles Barr's book on Ealing⁶, could also be labelled 'sociological' inasmuch as they carefully and illuminatingly tease out levels of meaning from texts by, among other methods, references to contemporary social discourses. The problem with 'sociological' approaches to British cinema, then, is precisely one of loose terminology.

'Sociology' is a word with satisfyingly scientific overtones, and as such was bound to appeal to a field of study so anxious to flex its credentials in order to be admitted into the staid constellation of respectable academic disciplines. The vast majority of work in film studies that has been labelled 'sociological', however, is nothing of the kind: it is social history, not sociology. Such a designation may sound less precise, but given that film studies is dealing with constantly shifting codes, discourses and ideologies, this release from quasi-scientific expectations should be welcomed. Unhelpfully rigid sociological notions of determinants and effects can only do harm to film analysis (the damage has been even greater in television studies), as Andrew Higson has pointed out⁷. I would, however, like to take issue with Higson's overall critique of the *British Cinema History* volume, not in order to offer an unnecessary re-review, but to try and head off his hegemonic attempt to capture British cinema for precisely the type of analysis I began this article by criticising. If I lapse at times into a caricature of Higson's arguments, I can only plead the constrictions of brevity and also put forward the observation that his own critical method is not exactly averse to incorporating such a mode of address.

Higson does not so much review *British Cinema History* as attempt to rewrite it. Using the twin extremes of 'sociological' as the ultimate condemnation and the name of Christian Metz as a genuflection towards the ultimate patriarchal wisdom, he expends little time or patience on the details of the arguments offered by the contributors to the volume in question – dismissing their entire methodology and substituting his own. (The contributors come, in fact, from a variety of perspectives, but each is close enough to Higson's amorphous notion of 'sociology' to earn

⁵ See, as a typical example, Marwick's *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA Since 1930*, London, Fontana, 1980.

⁶ Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios*, London, Cameron and Tayleur/David and Charles, 1977.

⁷ Andrew Higson, *op cit*, *passim*.

⁹ See John Hill, 'Some Theses on the British "New Wave"', in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds), *British Cinema History*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983.

banishment.) The most revealing instance of this comes when he writes of texts which contain 'moments of apparent "progressiveness" (moments of excess)'⁸. Here a political reading of films is both shrugged off (the inverted commas) and rewritten into the correct discourse, which is, needless to say, psychoanalysis. There may indeed be a correlation between progressiveness and excess, but to imply that one is merely an erroneous critical affectation while the other is Truth is rather dubious. The elevation of psychoanalysis above politics is the structuring principle of the whole article, the social disappears beneath the psychic. Desire, pleasure, rapture, rupture, 'thrilling tension' – these, it would appear, are all cinema has to offer. In which case, what chance has a book like *British Cinema History*, when all it can offer is thorough research and concrete information? Little to set the pulses throbbing there.

Higson's heady, tremulous discourse of spectating-as-rapture collapses all aspects of the viewing experience into a single blissful surrender to some nebulous 'jouissance'. In Higson's defence of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* this surrender assumes the concrete form of swooning into the beefy arms of Albert Finney – a pleasant prospect, undeniably, but hardly a cogent argument against John Hill's criticism of the film's sexual politics⁹.

It is, finally, not the actual details of Higson's methodology that alarm. They are, in the right hands, valid and valuable. It is his attempt to impose them as a monolith, erecting certain essential criteria as the only criteria of analysis, smothering at birth the variety of critical approaches offered by *British Cinema History*. British cinema has been too long excluded from serious critical debate for us to stand by and see it engulfed in a swamp of sub-Barthesian grandiosity. It must be opened up to the widest possible number of analytic methods.

Victim, then, could be studied from any amount of perspectives, but I intend to concentrate on the social historical aspects of the film, its status as a pivotal moment within discourses of homosexuality in recent British history. I want to make such an emphasis for personal, which is to say political, reasons: namely that the construction and position of homosexuality in this culture are matters of greater urgency to me than the intricacies of textual mechanics. And if that sounds like a wilful dismissal of cinematic specificity, a blindness to the processes of signification, I can only respond by suggesting that there might on occasions be more important things in life than films.

Situating *Victim*: Conceptualisations of Homosexuality

Victim is not a film that makes us dig very deep to unearth an ideological project; it is a film with a specific social intention, as its producer, Michael Relph, wrote:

The film puts forward the same point of view as the Wolfenden Committee, that the law should be changed. . . . the film shows that homosexuality may

be found in otherwise completely responsible citizens in every strata of society.¹⁰

The Wolfenden Report was published in 1957, and recommended the partial decriminalisation of male homosexual acts; the law was eventually changed in 1967. *Victim* was explicitly conceived of as part of a public debate on homosexuality which had been going on since the early 1950s. This had been instigated by the Burgess and Maclean scandal in 1951, when the two spies who had fled from Britain to Moscow were revealed to be homosexual. The scandal established a parallel between sexual and political deviance which was one of the central tenets of the ideologies informing the Cold War. In the United States, the virulent paranoia of McCarthyism insisted on this connection to the extent that the government officially forbade the employment of 'Homosexuals and other Sex Perverts'.¹¹ (In May 1982, Margaret Thatcher issued a directive banning the employment of homosexuals in the British Diplomatic Service – old Cold War ideologies for the new Cold War.) Homosexuality was 'exposed' by the popular press, led by the *Sunday Pictorial*'s series called 'Evil Men'. There were a number of sensational trials, some involving public figures, and it was one of these (the trial of Lord Montagu, Michael Pitt-Rivers and Peter Wildeblood) that was a major catalyst in the setting up of the Wolfenden Committee.

The Montagu trial has a particular importance as an index of the prevalent constructions of homosexuality. Debate centred not on the morality or immorality of homosexual practices, but on whether the basis of the law forbidding them was in any way just – was it the function of the legal system to prohibit individually chosen behaviour? As Peter Wildeblood recalls in his autobiography¹², he and his co-defendants received a great deal of public sympathy, with sympathy being the operative word. Homosexuality was conceptualised as a disease which was incurable – thus its sufferers could not 'help' the way they were. This theory, offensive as it now seems, was at least a step forward from the hatred of homosexuality expressed by organised religions. Discourses of illness and treatment thus replaced those of sin and damnation.

A leading advocate of the disease theory stated that:

*The homosexual is not just a man with a wicked or perverse wish to behave differently from others. He is not someone offered the loveliness of women and by sheer cussedness spurning it; he is ill inasmuch as a dwarf is ill, because he has never developed.*¹³

The same writer comes to this perfectly sincere conclusion:

*Possibly the greatest importance of homosexuality is that it causes so much unhappiness. If happiness is of any value (and the writer regards it as having the greatest human importance) then homosexuality should be eliminated by every means in our power.*¹⁴

¹⁰ Letter to *Films and Filming*, May 1961, p 3.

¹¹ See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, London, Quartet, 1979, p 160. My historical generalisations about this period are greatly indebted to Weeks' invaluable book.

¹² Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1957 (first published 1955).

¹³ Clifford Allen, *Homosexuality: Its Nature, Causation and Treatment*, London, 1958, p 34.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p 54.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p 73.

¹⁶ Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, London, HMSO, 1957, p 11.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p 22.

¹⁸ Richard Hauser, *The Homosexual Society*, London, 1962, p 25.

¹⁹ Gordon Westwood, *A Minority*, London, 1960, p 198.

The fact that such unhappiness might be due to the social situation of homosexuals rather than their sexuality lies entirely outside this writer's vision. That the idea of a contented homosexual is anathema to him is shown by his typology of deviants, in which Type 3 is the 'homosexual in whom inversion is accepted as part of his personality. . . . One must accept that Type 3 is too ill, too grossly deviated and lacks the urge to be cured.'¹⁵

The Wolfenden Report rejected the idea of homosexuality as a disease, but saw it as 'a state or condition'.¹⁶ The law ought to be changed, argued the Report, because other, equally repugnant, forms of behaviour were not proscribed by the criminal law: to penalise homosexuality alone was unfair. Wolfenden was in no way a validation of the homosexual option, but a logical, utilitarian acknowledgement of an injustice that should be rectified. The nuclear family was still written of as 'the basic unit of society'¹⁷, leaving homosexuality as an unfortunate, implicitly inferior condition.

Much of the debate that followed Wolfenden aspired to some kind of sociology, and homosexuals were transformed from laboratory specimens into statistics. Books about the homosexual subculture began to appear, blending charts and tables with prurient reports from intrepid sociologists who ventured into gay clubs and pubs. Their conclusions tended to show little advance on the disease theory:

*society should help (but not force) its citizens to live a full and happy family life. . . . It is worth making an effort to try to bring this about . . . since there are many who are not completely homosexual but may be deflected from normal heterosexual pursuits or at least may be hampered by homosexuality. . . . On the other hand, those who are true homosexuals should be advised and helped to live with their social underdevelopment as a handicapped minority without any false glamour and yet without victimisation.*¹⁸

although others were compassionately post-Wolfenden:

*The present social and legal methods of dealing with the problem are irrational and tend to create more social evils than they remedy. This emotional hostility affects many thousands of individuals and reflects upon the community as a whole.*¹⁹

These quotations ought to indicate the range of heterosexual notions of homosexuality; what remains to be examined is how homosexuals saw themselves.

Obviously a marginalised social group only constructs a self-image as a result of dissatisfaction with the images of it constructed by others, and those imposed images continue to set the parameters. The homosexual self-image of the 1950s, then, was entirely bounded by heterosexual paradigms. Even Peter Wildeblood can only see his sexuality in these terms:

*I am no more proud of my condition than I would be of having a glass eye or a hare lip. On the other hand, I am no more ashamed of it than I would be of being colour-blind or of writing with my left hand. . . . I am attracted towards men in the way in which most men are attracted towards women. I am aware that many people, luckier than myself, will read this statement with incredulity and perhaps with derision; but it is the simple truth. . . . I know that it cannot ever be entirely accepted by the rest of the community and I do not ask that it should. . . . If it were possible for me to become like them I should do so. . . .*²⁰

²⁰ Peter Wildeblood, op cit, p 8.

²¹ *ibid*, p 59.

²² Richard Dyer, *Stars*, London, British Film Institute, 1979, p 36.

Despite the anger, or more likely sadness, that such words are liable to produce in any modern gay reader, it must be remembered that in the context of 1955 an autobiography containing the phrase 'I am a homosexual' was a major intervention. Wildeblood's book also contains a number of remarks echoed or even repeated in *Victim*. Henry the barber's 'Tell them there's no magic cure for how we are' comes from page 185 of Wildeblood, while Calloway's quotation from Oscar Wilde about 'the rage of Caliban seeing his own face reflected in the glass' also appears in Wildeblood. Most importantly, the crucial exchange between Melville Farr and his wife,

Farr: I believe that if I go into court as myself I can draw attention to the fault in the existing law.

Laura: Knowing it will destroy you utterly?

Farr: Yes.

is not at all dissimilar to the way Wildeblood describes his reasons for openly declaring his sexuality in court:

*I could see what I must do. . . . I would be the first homosexual to tell what it felt like to be an exile in one's own country. I might destroy myself, but perhaps I could help others.*²¹

Before handing out labels like 'progressive' or 'reactionary' to a text (and if that smacks of evaluation, all I can say is that non-evaluative analysis is a self-deluding myth unhelpfully fostered by certain critical tendencies), it must be precisely situated within the circulating discourses, the flux of ideas (to borrow Richard Dyer's useful phrase²²) informing its moment of production. *Victim* is a point of intersection, a site of confluence between two such fluxes. One of these is the contemporary range of constructions of homosexuality, as indicated above, and the other is the contemporary range of positions on sexuality taken up within British film culture. This latter topic is clearly immense and intensely problematic. As a way of illuminating the issues involved without losing myself in textual micro-analysis, I want to look briefly at the critical reception of *Victim* in the context of the ideological stances and value-systems mobilised at that point in history by dominant critical discourses. What attitudes did those discourses adopt towards sexuality?

²³ Charles Barr, op cit,
p 76.

²⁴ William Whitebait,
International Film
Annual no 2, London,
1958, p 11.

Situating *Victim*: Sexuality and British Film Culture

Charles Barr, with characteristic accuracy, has written of Ealing films' 'suppression of a dark world'²³ as being a major structuring force in those particular texts, and this perception can be extended across the whole range of post-World War II British film production. This suppression, this clamping down of desire, can be seen at work in films as varied as *Brief Encounter*, *The Dam Busters*, and *The Belles of St. Trinians*. However, the relentlessly middlebrow parlour game that goes under the name of British film criticism (in newspapers and non-specialist magazines) can never perceive the presence of sexuality in texts unless it is made blatant, discussed and/or enacted on screen. In the context of film criticism in the late '50s and early '60s, this is made plain in the adulation given to the social realist, angry-young-men films, like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.

It was these films' treatment of sexual matters that was a crucial part in their being acclaimed as some kind of artistic renaissance. Key words in the discourse of acclamation were 'maturity' ('when will British films grow up?'), asked an impatient critic in 1958²⁴) and 'frankness'. Thus the sight of June Ritchie's naked back in *A Kind of Loving* was seen as a step forward, even a breakthrough, in the quest for a 'relevant' and 'contemporary' national cinema. Obviously this attitude has its roots in the omnipresent hegemony of 'realism' that still dominated conceptions of cinema in Britain at that time, and that hegemony also helps to explain the hostility towards particular other areas of film production expressed by the same critics who rushed to welcome the naturalistic impetus. Furthermore, when one reads that hostility through a perspective of sexuality, all sorts of things fall into place.

The two specific areas of film production that I am referring to are the Hammer and *Carry On* films. Both were major commercial successes, both were dismissed or attacked by contemporary critics, and both are centrally concerned with sexuality. Hammer's early horror films are clearly informed by displaced eroticism, and the *Carry On* comedies base their humour on a contempt for bourgeois propriety and a grinning awareness of desire. The critical consensus, with its prescriptive commitment to a narrowly realist aesthetic serving as the vehicle for a vapidly liberal social awareness, could not be expected to cope with either coded sexual fantasies or dirty jokes – any film which dealt with sexuality outside a fundamentally moralistic framework was simply not acceptable.

One more, now infamous, case should be mentioned here. The critical reception of *Peeping Tom* crystallises the attitudes I have been sketching. Michael Powell's films had long been distrusted by the critical consensus, principally through their (clearly interdependent) stress on visual excess and eroticism (*Black Narcissus* is probably the best welding of the two). That distrust became, with the release of *Peeping Tom*, genuine ostracism. The critical reaction was nothing short of hysteria, a fascinating case study of the psychopathology of the English middle classes, and it centred precisely on the text's implications regarding sexuality and

cinema. The film flushed the dormant puritanism of the critical consensus into the open, with, for example, the *Daily Worker* accusing it of 'befouling the screen', and hurling adjectives like 'perverted', 'debased', 'diseased', 'pornographic' and 'depraved'²⁵.

How can *Victim* be placed in such a context? Its very choice of topic puts it in some ways under the rubric of 'frankness', but its visual and narrative modes are those of melodrama, not social naturalism. It can in fact be linked to a series of earlier 'problem pictures' which had dealt with issues like racism (*Sapphire*, made by the same team responsible for *Victim*, and its twin in many respects) and juvenile crime.²⁶ The people involved in its production ensured that it was seen as part of the 'old school' of British film-making rather than as part of the supposed renaissance. Its use of the thriller genre is explained by the dominant notion of homosexuality as a social issue, a problem that had to be discussed rather than depicted; but since audiences would not pay to watch a discussion, the issues are mediated through generic codes. (The two 1960 films about Oscar Wilde utilised codes of costume drama and fictional biography to similar ends.)

Many reviews remarked upon this use of genre, with the *Monthly Film Bulletin* claiming that the film 'dressed up . . . male inversion in a cleverly-designed Crime Club dust-jacket'²⁷. The notices were of course determined by each writer's attitude to homosexuality, and these range across the variety discussed above. Some were openly hostile:

Make private association lawful, it pleads, and blackmail will cease. But will homosexuality?

Sunday Telegraph, September 3, 1961

The most anti-homosexual review of all came when the film opened in the United States:

Everybody in the picture who disapproves of homosexuality turns out to be an ass, a dolt, or a sadist. Nowhere does the film suggest that homosexuality is a serious (but often curable) neurosis that attacks the biological basis of life itself. 'I can't help the way I am', says one of the sodomites in this movie. 'Nature played me a dirty trick'. And the scriptwriters . . . accept this sick-silly self-delusion as a medical fact.

Time, February 23, 1962

Most British reviewers were more informed by the debates around Wolfenden, and took up a position of liberal concern:

it does invite a compassionate consideration of this particular form of human bondage.

The Times August 30, 1961

a serious and sympathetic study of men in the grip of a compulsion beyond their control. . . a sobering picture of the way homosexual inclinations make a permanent nightmare of private lives.

Daily Worker, September 2, 1961

²⁵ See Ian Christie, 'The Scandal of "Peeping Tom"', in Ian Christie (ed), *Powell, Pressburger and Others*, London, British Film Institute, 1978, pp 55-56.

²⁶ Director Basil Dearden and producer Michael Relph collaborated on many films, including *The Blue Lamp* (1950), *The League of Gentlemen* (1960), as well as *Victim* and *Sapphire*. See Richard Dyer, "'Victim': Hermeneutic Project', *Film Form*, 2, 1977, for further information on the 50s 'problem picture'. I'd also like to state here how influential Dyer's article on *Victim* has been on my work, however our conclusions may differ.

²⁷ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1961, p 141.

²⁹ Lord Arran speaking in the House of Lords, quoted in H Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love*, London, 1970, p 274.

The critical consensus could be summarised as regarding *Victim* as a well-intentioned piece of special pleading, successful in making its social point, but in the process of doing so becoming schematised and propagandist and therefore aesthetically unsatisfactory. Two particular points shared by almost every review are firstly a direct reference to Wolfenden, and secondly specific praise for the acting. According to the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, despite the plot's 'glibness',

*The performances, on the other hand, have a definite passion . . . a dignity, a sobriety, an impression of really caring.*²⁸

The use of the word 'passion' sits rather uneasily in this context, and potentially opens up another way of reading the film. Dignity, sobriety, caring, compassion, sympathy – reviews which use words like these are clearly situated in a post-Wolfenden ideology, connoting a tone of self-congratulatory benevolence to one's unfortunate inferiors, but 'passion' is a term of a different order, an index of a different code. An opposition of dignity/passion could usefully be employed as a way into the text, for if *Victim* holds to the former, stays within the bounds of liberal tolerance asked for by Peter Wildeblood and granted by Wolfenden, then its only real interest is as a piece of cultural history. If, however, it transgresses so as to incorporate passion, refute sobriety and expose sympathy as oppressive 'condescension', it might still have a use in terms of modern gay politics. Michael Relph's remarks indicate the intention behind the making of the film, and that intention would seem to have succeeded in terms of critical reception, but I would argue (and hope to show in the next section) that *Victim*'s moments of passion, as the *Monthly Film Bulletin*'s reviewer unwittingly described them, subvert the hegemonic drive to dignity and tolerance and hint at what could be called a genuinely gay discourse, a discourse of homosexual desire.

The affirmation of homosexual desire is, of course, exactly what the opponents of Wolfenden feared would happen if the laws on homosexuality were altered. By its mobilisation of concepts of compassion and tolerance, Wolfenden (and *Victim*) attempted the balancing act of advocating legal change without being seen to 'approve of' homosexuality. Even as the 1967 Sexual Offences Act was passing into law, belatedly implementing Wolfenden's proposals, one of its strongest parliamentary advocates showed his trepidation over the possible consequences:

*I ask one thing, and I ask it earnestly. I ask those who have, as it were, been in bondage and for whom the prison doors are now open to show their thanks by comporting themselves quietly and with dignity. . . . Any form of ostentatious behaviour now or in the future, any form of public flaunting, would be utterly distasteful and would, I believe, make the sponsors of the Bill regret that they have done what they have done.*²⁹

Locked doors, continence, and humble gratitude – these were what was expected of homosexuals after 1967. As Tom Robinson's song *Glad to be*

Gay acidly put it, 'the buggers are legal now, what more are they after?'

What we were after, and what we are still after, depended on precisely what the liberal heterosexual consensus was so afraid of—ostentation, flaunting, coming out. I base my belief in the comparative radicalism of *Victim* in the view that it is a film that, against the grain, advocates coming out. I don't want to offer a long and detailed analysis, as my methodological intentions in writing this article are founded on providing the necessary socio-cultural and historical information that would make an informed reading possible—in other words, I don't want to set up my reading as anything unique or special. Given the knowledge of the relevant debates and discourses, I think my conclusions would seem fairly standard.³⁰ Instead, I want to indicate those moments in the text when the maintenance of its inscribed liberalism fails, and when what I see as the discourse of homosexual desire (an acknowledgement of which is the prerequisite for any notion of gay politics) emerges.

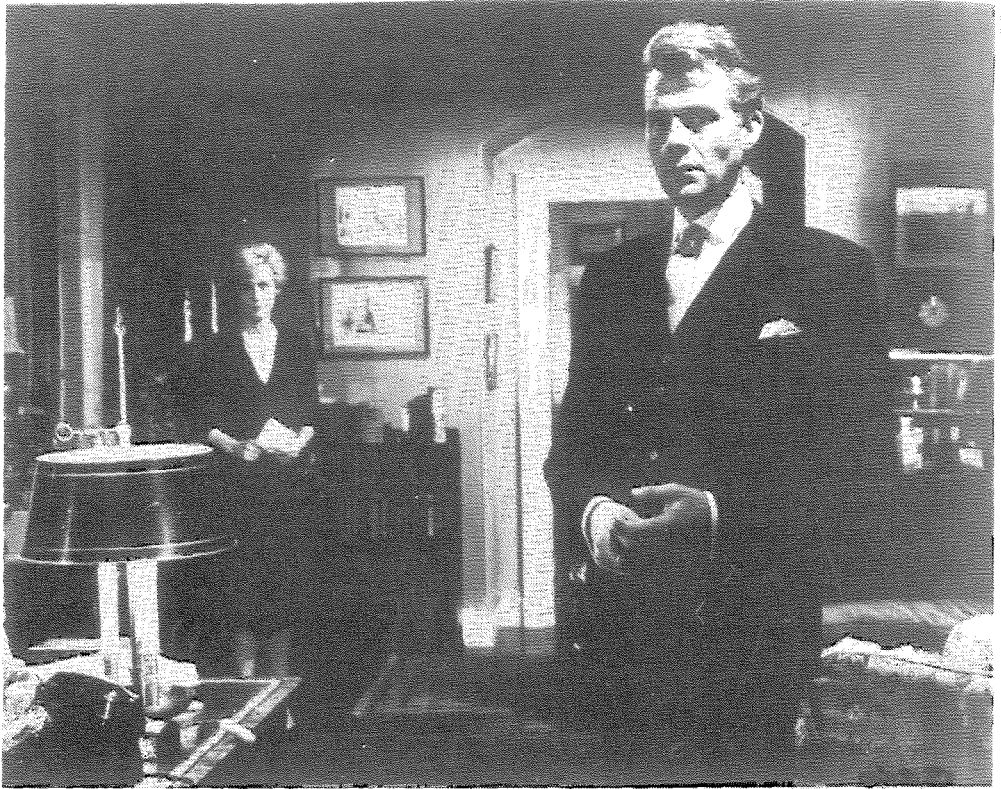
Reading *Victim*: An Indictment of Repression

Film analysis which attempts to tease out strands of meaning other than those signalled by textual mechanisms is usually compelled to locate contradictory elements of narrative and/or *mise-en-scène*, but with *Victim* this is especially difficult to do. Since the film was made primarily for extra-textual reasons, consciously to effect social change, it is in many ways propaganda, and as such is particularly careful at sewing together its various threads. Richard Dyer has already mapped out the intricacy with which every character and incident is bound tightly into the central narrative drive, but there still remain, as he says, 'hints of strain'³¹. If we want to identify where that strain is greatest, in terms of the liberal problematic being exposed and questioned, we must look at two adjacent scenes—Farr's 'confession' to Laura, and his visit to Mandrake's flat. It is here that the containment of desire breaks down.

In the 'confession' scene, Laura forces her husband to tell her the truth about his relationship with Jack Barrett. As she pleads 'Tell me everything, I want to know', it is easy to read her as the heterosexual audience inscribed into the text, with 'everything' meaning the physical details of homosexual love—so that Laura's desire for narrative elucidation becomes a kind of prurience. (The motif of the photograph which is the source of the blackmail and thus of the whole narrative, but which we are never allowed to see, serves a similar function of instigating a double-edged desire.) Farr's reply is that 'I stopped seeing him because I wanted him. Do you understand, because I wanted him.' Simply writing those words cannot convey the strength of Dirk Bogarde's delivery of them, and thus it is here that my reading is liable to slip into helpless subjectivism, for until we have some adequate account of film acting beyond the loose and impressionistic, it is impossible to pin down precisely how or why it is this exchange that shatters *Victim*'s carefully tolerant project. It

³⁰ Although, of course, not closed to dispute. Richard Dyer, in "'Victim': Hegemonic Project', op cit, reads the film in a different way, and Jeffrey Weeks, op cit, still sees it as the 'archetypal liberal "pity" film of the period' (p 174).

³¹ Dyer, "'Victim': Hegemonic Project', op cit, p 12.



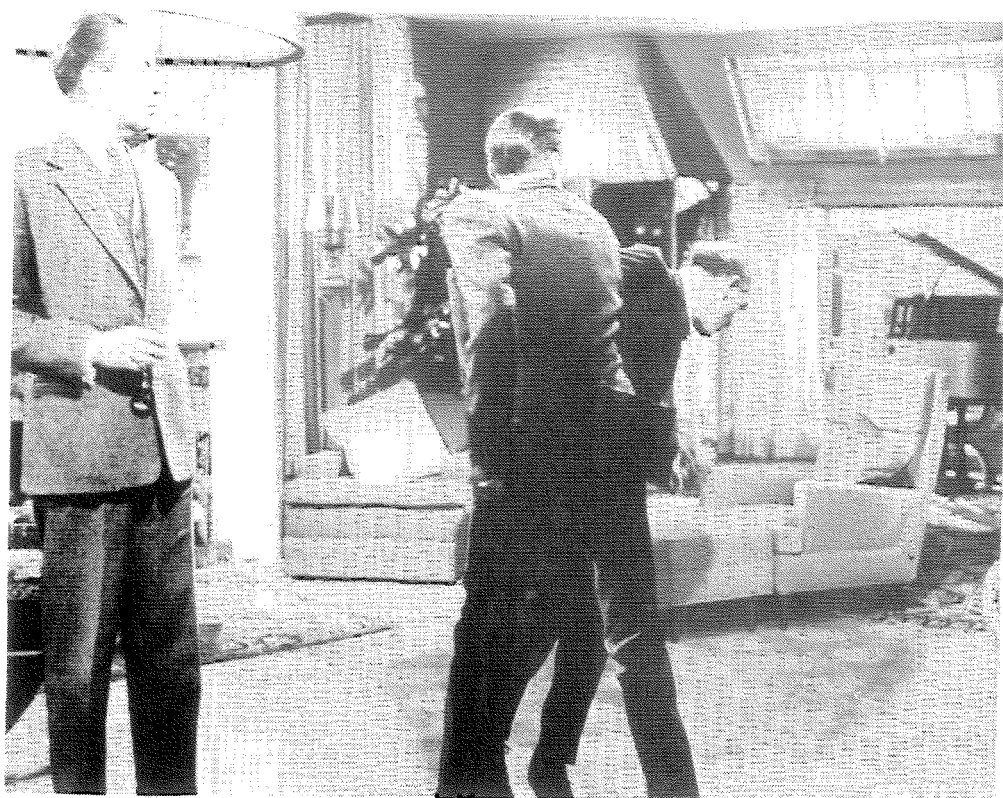
Homosexual desire finds its voice: the confession scene in *Victim*.

is the moment when irresistible sexual desire finds, literally, its voice. It is tempting to make grand claims for this instant in this text, since it is desire that British cinema fought so long to suppress, and here it becomes unanswerable, the text's project irreparable. In a heterosexual context the directness of these words, their deeper resonances, would be striking enough; as the unleashing of homosexual desire it borders on the revolutionary. Except, of course, that the film must now put all its efforts into the unravelling of the complex thriller plot, in an attempt to bury the radical break in the seductions of the hermeneutic resolution. Before that, however, there is the second of the two crucial scenes.

Here Farr is confronted by three other homosexuals who are also blackmail victims, and they attempt to dissuade him from continuing his search to find the blackmailer. They mention Farr's own homosexuality, at which point he tries one last piece of self-denial:

Farr: I may share your instincts, but I've always resisted them.
Mandrake: Yes, that's what cost young Stainer his life.

This refers to an incident some years previously when Farr's attempts at denying his sexuality had ended in his lover's suicide. Thus the link between repression and death, which has already been hinted at in Jack



Desire displaced into aggression: Farr punches the accusing Mandrake.

Barrett's suicide, is made explicit. The film becomes an indictment of repression, an attack on the refusal to acknowledge the desire that Farr/Bogarde has in the previous scene finally affirmed. As if to underline the centrality of this moment, the film flares into the one moment of violence in an otherwise very wordy text, as Farr punches Mandrake to the ground. This single assertion of physicality confirms the sudden presence of sexual desire, here displaced into aggression. The subsequent narrative twists cannot hope to erase what has gone before. The ending's move towards repositioning Farr as the bearer of timid Wolfendenism, its attempted recuperative strategy, seems both unworthy and risible.

I have chosen to stress the escape of desire into the text as its most important feature, and have insisted that the narrative resolution fails to achieve any convincing degree of closure. It might be useful to mention one of the more insidious ways in which the ideologies governing the text construct notions of sexuality. This returns us to the liberal reformists' fear of ostentation and flaunting, by which we can assume they mean camp.

I use camp in a purely descriptive sense, as designating the attitudinal and conversational theatricalised male femininity adopted by many gay men as a mixture of defensive parody and calculated shock tactics (it may also be a potent weapon of subverting ascribed gender roles, but that is a

³² Peter Wildeblood, op cit, p 13.

³³ Rodney Garland, *The Heart In Exile*, London, Four Square Books, 1961, pp 47-8 (originally published in 1953).

³⁴ On homosexuality and comedy, particularly television comedy, see Andy Medhurst and Lucy Tuck, 'The Gender Game', in Jim Cook (ed), *Television Sitcom*, London, British Film Institute, 1982.

difficult question I don't have the space to deal with). A major feature of the liberal tolerance of homosexuality centred around Wolfenden is its hostility to camp, which, given camp's inherent snubbing of codes of dignity and restraint, is hardly surprising. What is perhaps odd, and not a little unnerving, is the eagerness with which those few homosexuals who found a public voice as part of those debates sought to join the condemnation of their more flamboyant comrades. Peter Wildeblood was at great pains to differentiate himself, as a man labouring under a 'tragic disability', from 'the effeminate creatures who love to make an exhibition of themselves'.³² This tendency to court heterosexual approval by striving to project a 'normal' appearance is even more strongly shown in a 1950s novel called *The Heart In Exile*, where the suit-wearing, professional-classes homosexual narrator attacks

*pansies. . . I try hard to be understanding, but I shudder from them. It is not only that they give the game away, but it is my experience that such people are usually unintelligent, verbose, neurotic and generally tiresome. . . full of either self-pity or of that peculiar parody of self-righteousness which would be ridiculous if it were not so pathetic. . . Nature has been unkind to them and they try to restore the balance through the easier and less efficient of two ways. Instead of physical exercise, which could help, they resort to plucked eyebrows and an excessive application of the wrong shade of rouge.*³³

Since *Victim's* project depends on securing heterosexual audience sympathy (and nothing more), it must take pains to ensure all its homosexual characters are impeccably non-ostentatious. There is one slightly camp man, perhaps in the interests of social verisimilitude, but that is Mickie, whose involvement in the sub-plot of writing fraudulent begging letters removes him from the sphere of the pitiable into that of the reprehensible (in terms of narrative logic, at least; I find him among the most sympathetic characters, which may well have something to do with his campness). More importantly, there was a scene in the shooting script which did not reach the screen, in which Jack Barrett's friend Eddy is said to speak with 'a faint "camp" note in his voice'. Clearly the negative feelings campness was assumed to evoke in the heterosexual audience could not be risked. One of the prejudices *Victim* so stoically sets out to answer is the equation between male homosexuality and (to use the word which in itself contains a wealth of cultural/ideological meaning) effeminacy. Until *Victim*, after all, audiences were likely to have seen homosexuality on screen purely in terms of stereotyped queens, most often in comedies or as comic relief.³⁴ The text positions its assumed audience so that it will nod in agreement with Inspector Harris' talk of 'little people' and 'unfortunate devils', and comfort itself with the patronising remarks made by Frank to his wife about Jack Barrett - 'I feel sorry for him. He's very lonely deep inside. He hasn't got what you and I have got'.

So, the ideological project of *Victim* is clear enough, but I hope I have shown that it is still possible to snatch moments of radicalism from the text, moments which could still be of particular use to gay spectators. Those moments are also points of excess in the textual system, but,

unlike Andrew Higson, I would not want to push the political meanings one can adduce from such moments off the agenda.

Conclusion: Reasserting the Social Text

It is too easy and too lazy to keep fighting the old battles between textual and contextual analysis, labelling one idealism and the other sociologism. To make any kind of progress we must try to fuse the two, find a productive synthesis that avoids both a deterministic privileging of social force over textual productivity and its opposite number and partner in crime, an aestheticist fetishising of the undoubted pleasures of the text³⁵. It was heartening, then, to find two articles in a recent *Screen* that advocate just such a synthesis – the articles by Annette Kuhn and Barbara Klinger³⁶. I would, however, argue that given the massive predominance in recent years of pure textualism, the case for the social nature of cultural production still has to be made quite insistently. As Barbara Klinger writes,

*The text . . . is an intersection at which multiple and 'extra-textual' practices of signification circulate. . . . The 'law' of the text, then, has to be tampered with to exact a less streamlined and more socially-responsive theory of the cinema/ideology relation . . . thus more adequately attending to the constituent features of the multi-faceted phenomenon of ideological maintenance.*³⁷

The only problem with this comment is that, peeling away the rococo academicism of the prose, it is actually a statement of the extremely obvious, and the fact that it had to be made (and it certainly did) is something of an indictment of the damage done by certain tendencies in film theory.

I totally accept the critique of overly sociological models that impose a banal cause-and-effect determinism, but I also refuse to jettison history from cultural analysis. My reading of *Victim* roots itself in a careful study of the dynamics of an historical moment, but that does not mean that the text unproblematically 'reflects' the context. Besides, that very distinction is not valid. Texts and contexts are indivisibly interrelated discourses, each is a part of the other, and to conceptualise them as discrete is to render full analysis impossible.

³⁵ This phrase is not intended as a slur on Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*, a book which I find endlessly provocative and stimulating; it does worry me, however, that so many critics appear to take it perfectly seriously. . . .

³⁶ Barbara Klinger, op cit; Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres', *Screen*, Jan-Feb 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 18-28.

³⁷ Barbara Klinger, op cit, p 44.

MALEFUNCTION

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE ON MASCULINITY IN THE CINEMA BY IAN GREEN

I

¹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman', in *The Pelican Freud Library vol 9: Case Histories II*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, pp 399-400.

² Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', *Screen* Nov/Dec 1983, vol 24 no 6, pp 2-16.

³ In using this plural term, I am deliberately referring to a multiplicity of social subjects, rather than the unitary 'spectator' of psychoanalytic theory. For more on this distinction, see Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres', *Screen* Jan/Feb 1984, vol 24 no 1, pp 18-25.

*Psychoanalysis has a common basis with biology, in that it presupposes an original bisexuality in human beings (as in animals). But psychoanalysis cannot elucidate the intrinsic nature of what in conventional or biological phraseology is termed 'masculine' and 'feminine': it simply takes over the two concepts and makes them the foundation of its work. When we attempt to reduce them further, we find masculinity vanishing into activity and femininity into passivity and that does not tell us enough.*¹

IN THIS ARTICLE I wish to take up issues raised by Steve Neale's recent *Screen* article, 'Masculinity as Spectacle'². This attempted to continue a debate about the construction of masculinity in the cinema, a complex point of fascination (untheorised) which I feel has been central to my return to the cinema since childhood. This small confession leads me to a feeling of disappointment in the 'results' achieved at least recently by the application of a complex discourse of theory and ideas, the psychoanalytic, to an area it seems most appropriately suited – phantasy and the 'imaginary' prompted by the material of cinema.

In discussing this 'problem' – masculinity in the cinema – psychoanalytic theory tends to acknowledge

(1) the complexity of such matters as 'phantasy', 'identification', the sexual, the erotic and

(2) the complexity of, and differences in, attitudes, feelings, responses and emotions individuals³ will have as new input (e.g. a new film) interacts with, reconfirms, reconstructs, reorganises their particular psyches and 'subjectivity'.

Given the acknowledgement of complexity in the very application of its ideas my impression is that the terminology of psychoanalysis as used in this debate is beginning to enshrine the meaning of such terms as given in (1) and gloss over the question of the diversity of reactions as in (2) – the verbal acknowledgements that people make (and conceivably, familiarly within this psychoanalytic discourse, the thoughts they refuse to make, refuse to acknowledge) about how they reacted towards a film or the construction of a character within it.

My starting point begins with another personal observation, that with the application of psychoanalytic ideas to these 'problems' in cinema I have become less sure (pleasantly hesitant, doubtful, curious) about what

are and where are points of eroticism, the sexual, identification in any particular film; I find myself disagreeing with others about whether and when and why male images and male heroes are invested with the erotic, whether we identify with them and what that means; whether Peckinpah's films are indicative of 'homosexual voyeurism' and what that means; whether we find these films 'exciting', and so on. I think that the contributions of psychoanalytic ideas will be more positively employed at this time by seeking to keep these issues open, the very objects of examination, rather than to close them off, turning to a complex of reasonably stable terms, whereby the representation of masculine *sexuality* becomes an eternal displacement in the face of them.

II

I detect a tendency recently (*despite* psychoanalysis) to 'read off' the sexual or erotic in films as either 'present' or 'absent'; absent as repressed, displaced, mediated or 'structured absence', what *is* there as a symptom of. . . . As far as I can understand it, the 'present' is adjudged according to two norms:

- (1) The classic mainstream representation of women constructed as erotic or sexual: the disposition of their clothed or unclothed state, their being subject of and to male characters' desire within films and (directly) accessible to the male viewer's gaze.
- (2) The norm that the sexual, the erotic, are centred on a genital act (of love), are signified as 'present' when they are represented thus: verbally, 'I love you, let us therefore make love', and visually by attendant images of sexual intercourse.

Thus the 'absence' of the sexual and the erotic as attached to male images in the cinema in relation to predominantly heterosexual male viewers can be read off accordingly.

- (1) They are not defined as erotically or sexually as female images.
- (2) Although images of male sexuality are present when correlated with acts of love with women, they are displaced, repressed when correlated with male-to-male relationships either within the film or when relating audience to screen.

Presumably the argument is that films themselves attempt to establish these norms of presence and absence:

*there is constant work to channel and regulate identification in relation to sexual division, in relation to the orders of gender, sexuality and social identity and authority marking patriarchal society. Every film tends both to assume and actively to work to renew those orders, that division. Every film thus tends to specify identification in accordance with the socially defined and constructed categories of male and female.*⁴

My worry is that analysis is beginning to uphold these norms in order to confirm their operation, tautologically, in cinema. To do so is, paradox-

⁴ Steve Neale, *op cit*, p 5.

⁵ Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975, p 16.

⁶ Laufa Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

⁷ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.

⁸ Steve Neale, op cit, p 4.

⁹ However, Mulvey reappraises her argument in 'Afterthoughts ... Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*', *Framework* nos 15/16/17, Summer 1981, pp 12-15, where she deals with both female 'trans-sex identification' and female identification with masculinity/activity. I am obviously approaching the sexual division of identification from 'the other side'.

ically, to abandon psychoanalysis for the 'pre-Freudian' presumption that sex is *normally* interpersonal.

*Despite Freud's work, the temptation is still to see sexuality as interpersonal sexual relationships, and sexual phantasies or auto-eroticism as perverse. Thus in some ways it has been far easier for homosexuality to be accepted than, say, fetishism. In other words, sexuality, to be 'decent', must have an object.*⁵

Perhaps the key to this lies in the complex processes of identification afforded by the narrative of a film and mechanisms of narration coupled with the particular 'complex' that any individual viewer brings to the cinema, prompting him or her to phantasise in particular ways, ways that can quite possibly override some of the channelling and regulating work of a film or the cinema in general. How else could we disagree about films and react diversely? (Unless of course our disagreements are of no importance or unconsciously we all agree, in which case none of this matters.)

Neale begins by evoking the complexities within the notion of identification, informing both Mulvey's text⁶, to which we all return, and Ellis' use of the notion⁷:

*Ellis argues that identification is never simply a matter of men identifying with male figures on the screen and women identifying with female figures. Cinema draws on and involves many desires, many forms of desire. And desire itself is mobile, fluid, constantly transgressing identities, positions and roles. Identifications are multiple, fluid, at points even contradictory. Moreover, there are different forms of identification.*⁸

Instead of pursuing these 'possibilities', how 'cinema draws on ... many desires', etc, Neale closes down the argument again along the lines of the familiar polarity 'what is possible/what has in fact been', the latter pole 'in accordance with the socially defined and constructed categories of male and female'. This begs the very question as to whether films offer some kind of space to open up multiple, fluid and even contradictory identifications and phantasies, *whether or not* one says their ultimate ideological project is to close off or regulate such possibilities.

At the risk of giving simplistic examples (and perhaps too readily available to conscious elaboration, i.e. a kind of secondary revision) one can say that male heterosexual viewers can and do 'identify' with characters in films in 'multiple and fractured' ways. Overriding any channelling or regulating of identification in relation to *sexual division* are identifications with the vicissitudes of a particular narrative and with characters as mechanisms of narrative, factors that I find Neale and Mulvey under-value in their pursuit of the norms of phantasy and identification.⁹ Viewers trade off their identifications in relation to the economy of the plot. Men will admit to identifying with Charlotte Vail/Bette Davis in *Now Voyager* (1942) or Mildred Pierce/Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce* (1945) far beyond any 'available' male characters in the films and

perhaps as much as male characters in other films. Why? Firstly because they are the main characters who motivate the narratives, however one argues their relative activity/passivity. The film-phantasies promote sympathy, empathy, pity on behalf of these characters to whom both men and women seem capable of attaching their phantasies with equal ease. Whether women viewers exhibit a more intense response or a more complicated identification than men can ever do with these characters, is a matter that needs a methodology to answer. At any rate it would imply an opening up of the question of identification around multiple and diverse cross-gender audience response and not its closing off within the familiar polarities. Does Charlotte's struggle to maintain control of Jerry's daughter or Mildred's struggle with her daughter provide the raw material of phantasy more for some women than some men in the audience? Certainly men can 'understand' and identify but above all they can do so because these issues are the stuff of the plot and are attached to the struggles of the main characters. They are issues around which they



Bette Davis as Charlotte Vail in *Now Voyager*: a figure for male identification?

suffer and are signs of their sensitivity and vulnerability—within the conventions of tragedy and melodrama, they are available for fashioning ideal images, even cross-gender ones.

Secondly, it could be argued that these films do not offer available material in the form of male characters/ideal images suitable for men to identify with. For instance, in discussion I have heard Jerry (in *Now Voyager*) described as weak, indecisive and wet and Dr Jackworth as 'above it all' and not fully rounded/present enough in the narrative. In other words despite having large measures of 'aggression, power and control' (Neale) he is not suitable material for male identification in relation to Charlotte's central narrative involvement, which far outweighs all other possibilities of general involvement and identification. Men desiring to gain pleasure through identification have little option but to seek and find the image of Charlotte. If this is so it emphasises all the more the importance that needs to be attached to character as part of narrative and genre as a main channel of general identification processes.

Thirdly, it could be argued, more controversially, that the classic mainstream signs of eroticism usually attached to women in the cinema (see above) are held off or lessened in the characters/figures of Charlotte/Davis, Mildred/Crawford; that the concerns of 'woman' in these films are of independence and motherhood and thus a possible sexual disturbance in the cross-gender identification of heterosexual male viewers (i.e. by identifying with the object of desire, rather than its subject) is avoided. Again this may be so and should it be so, in order to 'test' it, one would have to look to female images in other films in which it is agreed the signs of the sexual/erotic are conventionally 'present'. There is little doubt that such signs are attached to Gilda/Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* (1946), yet Dyer argues that, partly because of the *circumstances of narrative* that privilege Gilda's feelings and her plight, male viewers are liable to feel uneasy with the reduction of Gilda:

*This moment of truth informs the rest of the film. We are likely to use it to read Gilda's collapse at Johnny's feet (when the phoney lawyer brings her back to him from Buenos Aires) not with sadistic delight (as the voice-over urges us) but with pity or identification.*¹⁰

I think it is more than likely that male heterosexual viewers will have identified with Gilda at more than just this point in the film, will feel pity and guilt at this point (due to also identifying with Johnny/Glenn Ford's desire for her) and will also retain a 'sadistic delight' in her capitulation. Perhaps a feeling of guilt on the part of male viewers 'allows' identification with her, in the desire to retain pleasure in the film, as well as 'excusing' the retention of a sadistic delight in phantasy, rendered uneasy by such a graphic display of 'aggression, power and control' on the part of Johnny. This is all speculation. The question remains as to how we assess identification processes in audiences, the intensely diverse reactions of individuals and, above all, 'contradictory' identifications as part of phantasy, investing film images with significance. Psychoanalysis

¹⁰ Richard Dyer, 'Resistance through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and Gilda', in E Ann Kaplan (ed), *Women in Film Noir*, London, British Film Institute, 1980, p 95.

in its acknowledgement of contradictory phantasies in dream, daydream and the unconscious *should* be able to help us; but first it needs to keep that acknowledgement before us at all times, preventing us from disavowing it.

It is around the issue of contradictory phantasies and identifications that I have my major doubt about Neale's article, despite his evocation of contradiction in his quotation from Ellis and his further reference to Rodowick's article in which the latter raises the possibility that phantasies of masochism and erotic attraction as well as those of authority and omnipotence can be sparked by male images on the part of heterosexual male viewers.¹¹ For instance Neale discusses the character played by Alain Delon in *Le Samourai* (1967) and begins to conclude that

*The film is by no means a critique of the male image it draws upon. On the contrary, it very much identifies (and invites us to identify) with Delon.*¹²

There is an implication here that a film which invites us to identify must exclude a critique of the male image it draws upon. Given the emphasis psychoanalytic theory has placed on the 'do-or-die' desire to identify within cinematic representation (even if it is only with the 'image') this is a stark division to make (or imply). Anyway Neale does not lay out the criteria for what would constitute a critique of the male image drawn upon in any film. Perhaps one could argue that *Le Samourai* contains a 'critique', in that wrapped up in Delon's narcissism as constructed in the film (his self-absorption, sartorial habits, his job, his independence, his beauty, his silence) is a great deal of self-pity, loneliness and fear (perhaps elements of Mulvey's nostalgic phallic narcissistic omnipotence)

¹¹ DN Rodowick, 'The Difficulty of Difference', *Wide Angle*, vol 5 no 1, pp 4-15.

¹² Steve Neale, *op cit*, p 7.



Alain Delon in *Le Samourai*: recognisable self-pity and fear.

that most men would readily *recognise* and feel easy *and* uneasy with. Thus on being caught in the curious gaze of 'an/other' his world is required to collapse.

But whether or not the film offers a critique of (or contradiction within) the male image, it definitely *does* invite us to identify with Delon and this is not necessarily a problem for the male viewer even if his ideal image is seen to disintegrate. On the contrary it is another source of (masochistic?, narcissistic?, self-pitying?) pleasure. Need there be a separation of 'critique' and 'identification'? I think it is more than likely that they need to be correlated in a viewer's reaction to a film if its 'critique' is to be effective, however we judge this. Again it is psychoanalysis which emphasises the contradictory realm of the unconscious, and identification processes in the cinema seem to be able to accommodate all sorts of splits and fractures. Perhaps it is only within identification that a critique can arise.

Thus Mulvey seems to propose some criteria for a critique *within* the male image in *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1958) where she argues the male viewer is made uneasy by somehow becoming aware of the regime of the controlling gaze exploited by Hitchcock, e.g.:

*In Vertigo, erotic involvement with the look is disorientating: the spectator's fascination is turned against him as the narrative carries him through and entwines him with the processes that he is himself exercising . . . the spectator, lulled into a false sense of security by the apparent legality of his surrogate, sees through his look and finds himself exposed as complicit, caught in the moral ambiguity of looking.*¹³

¹³ Laura Mulvey,
'Visual Pleasure and
Narrative Cinema',
op cit, p 16.



The controlling gaze of James Stewart's Scottie in *Vertigo*: uneasy identification?



The hero as loser: Warren Oates in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*.

But now Mulvey, following her brilliant analysis of *Vertigo* and *Rear Window*, has to cope with men declaring that they found *Vertigo* 'boring', 'uninvolving' and 'unemotional', unless of course these reactions add up to a symptomatic rejection of the unease induced in them by the film. . . . I, for one, astounded by such rejections of the film, found great pleasure in getting emotionally involved, implicated and psychically mangled by the film. In other words I have recouped 'unease' as pleasure (this is not unusual or difficult).

This kind of process (I am aware that I have not described it adequately) is even more marked in the familiar and widespread identification that some men make with the 'little men' of film, Ellis' bit-part player¹⁴, the loser, the eternal side-kick, the doomed 'simple soul', the creep—examples: William Bendix, Peter Lorre, Elisha Cooke, Jr, Warren Oates, Antonio Fargas. These 'character actors', stalking the male stars also appearing in the films, afford a self-pitying image of loss, lack, failure and, perhaps, a resistance to that other image whose shadow they inhabit. Some men have no problem 'identifying'—it is easy (easier). These actors have achieved 'cult' status, a sure sign of narcissistic involvement. When Warren Oates gained the opportunity to inhabit the male star position in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974) it allowed men to identify (with the greatest of nostalgia) with 'failure', of which this film offers the ideal image. There is no unease, rather the triumph of 'self-pity', an underrated stock-in-trade of male phantasy.

These kinds of male-to-male identification in the cinema open up a space (perhaps a small one) for a re-reading of Mulvey's analysis of *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* from this perspective. (Obviously hers was different

¹⁴ John Ellis, *op cit*,
p 43.

and this is not an attempt to dilute the theoretical and polemical value of that article.)

III

*In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly.*¹⁵

It is curious how in *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* there is a trade-off between the two types of male *activity* in the cinema, emphasised by Mulvey, Neale and others: the active control of the gaze and the active control of the narrative. In order to emphasise the curious, enquiring, sadistic gaze of both characters (Jeffries/James Stewart in *Rear Window* and Scottie/James Stewart in *Vertigo*), their active *control* of the narrative is lessened or completely negated. (I realise the emphasis placed on the controlling scopophilia of male viewer/male hero in the Metz-Mulvey psychoanalytic discourse, irrespective of the specific narrative activity of a male hero in any particular film. But this returns to my original point that there is a danger of displacing *any argument* about the male/female, active/passive polarities of 'classic' cinema.) Jeffries is rendered physically immobile by the narrative; he sees what's going on but is powerless to *act* on it; Lisa (girlfriend), Stella (nursemaid) and Doyle (detective) are his active surrogates in this respect. It is his immobility that makes him suffer a second crippling fall at the hands of Thorwald (villain). Jeffries berates Lisa for her lack of activity in life, her willingness to be subjected to man's gaze, but he criticises her from his own position of narrative passivity; it is she who is active and this increases his scopophilic excitation. When at the end, *doubly crippled, and asleep*, he seems to have won out over Lisa – she is dressed for 'male action' – she casts aside her travel guide and takes up a fashion magazine. There is an explicit splitting of male activity in *Rear Window*. It is his inactive stance, his lack of control of the narrative that renders Jeffries an active looker. Instead of one reinforcing the other (in the active/passive economy of male/female) one compensates for the other, but it doesn't work, hence the irony, the comedy of the ending.

In *Vertigo* Scottie is more active narratively – he is mobile. But in the first part of the film we get to know subsequently that all his acts (e.g. 'saving' Madeleine from suicide) are set up, controlled by another, Gavin Elster, and that of course Madeleine 'knows' more than he. His weakness is the threat of inactivity implied in his vertigo that is exploited in the fake death of Madeleine. Scottie's horror at failing to be the active male renders him totally inactive in hospital. The second part consists of his recreation of Judy as Madeleine to compensate for this. But it doesn't work. On conquering his vertigo (his narrative inactivity) he loses, again, the object of his gaze. Hence the irony, the despair of the ending. The film does not let him have his cake or eat it. Despite overcoming his narrative inactivity (he conquers his vertigo, forces a confession out of Judy,

accedes to 'normal' love) he then loses her. He is left in a position of passive, despairing acceptance, stigmatised by a contradiction in male identity that the film *investigates*, not symptomatically, not obliquely, but directly, or at least insofar as films can ever be said to be direct.

It is the *contradictions* about the active/passive axes within the male characters which make them interesting. Any male identification (implication and complicity) presumably involves a phantasy about the economy of activity and passivity as it is worked out in the central male character and the refusal of both films to exclude passivity from the male image. Perhaps this contradiction works its way through several of Hitchcock's men: Roger Thornhill/Cary Grant in *North by Northwest* (1959); Norman Bates/Anthony Perkins in *Psycho* (1960); both Bruno/Robert Walker and Guy/Farley Granger in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) (Bruno is passive in his life-style, active in his desire to solve problems, through murder; Guy active in life-style, passive in his attempts to solve his problems: the trade-off doesn't work); and most remarkably Johnny/Cary Grant in *Suspicion* (1941).

Suspicion, one of Hitchcock's most underrated films, flies in the face of Neale's concluding remarks. (It does not necessarily 'disprove' them as Neale is generalising about 'norms'; but I think it is worth considering that male norms and identities are not assumed by cinema but worked through *within* particular constructs of male characters.)

*While mainstream cinema, in its assumption of a male norm, perspective and look, can constantly take women and the female image as its object of investigation, it has rarely investigated men and the male image in the same kind of way: women are a problem, a source of anxiety, of obsessive enquiry; men are not. Where women are investigated, men are tested. Masculinity, as an ideal, at least, is implicitly known. Femininity is, by contrast, a mystery.*¹⁶

In *Suspicion* Johnny is the mystery as a man and as a male image. The narrative requires Lina/Joan Fontaine to judge him by his appearances (in both senses) and we are required to do the same, as we only gain access to him via Lina's point-of-view. His origins are a mystery, his reasons for marrying Lina ambiguous (in her eyes and ours); where he gets money requires investigation on the part of Lina; whether he loves Beaky or has done away with him, whether he wishes to kill Lina are mysteries. This last mystery is crucial. Lina suspects Johnny of wanting to murder her but it transpires he has been planning to murder *himself*. It is Johnny's identity and passivity that are under investigation in the film. He is suspect as a man. He is like a child in relation to the real world, with which he spontaneously reacts. He does not know how to 'earn' money; he loses his job managing an estate; his initial (childish) enthusiasms for projects, such as the land development, do not mature into anything. He sells Lina's father's chairs as they do not function as pleasure objects, using this acquired money to gratify instant pleasures in the form of gifts for himself and others: Lina, Beaky, the maid. He sees no reason why Beaky should not share his acquired wealth (nor does Beaky). Consequently he

¹⁶ Steve Neale, *op cit*, pp 15-16.



The mysteriously passive man: Cary Grant as Johnny in *Suspicion*.

is not understood by Lina who misinterprets his acts according to the norms of masculine activity: he wishes to be supported rather than support, to be passive rather than active, and because he does not fit what is expected of him as a male, to murder himself rather than others. What he does have to offer, actively, to others – love – to Lina and to Beaky, is ‘misread’ according to the norms of male conduct, by Lina, by us and by critics. . . .

In these examples I have attempted to take the comments by Ellis and Neale about the flow and contradiction of cinematic identification at their face value: that multiple, contradictory, complex and changing identifications can take place on the part of male heterosexual viewers during the viewing of a film. To overstress and reconfirm the male/female active/passive economy of cinematic identification courts danger when it comes to considering Freud’s claim that men and women share a single libido. It also avoids work on the fact that individuals come to the cinema and project phantasies onto the screen, phantasies partially or predominantly formed outside of the cinema – or at least, these phantasies interact with those offered up to us in the cinema. They meet somewhere.

*We must not imagine that the various products of this impulse towards fantasy, castles in the air or daydreams, are stereotyped or unchangeable. On the contrary, they fit themselves into the changing impressions of life, alter with the vicissitudes of life; every deep new impression gives them what might be called a ‘date-stamp’.*¹⁷

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming’, in *Delusion and Dream and Other Essays*, Beacon Press, 1956, p. 127 (‘Poetical Daydreaming – Creative Workers and Daydreaming’, in *Standard Edition*, vol. IX, 1908.)

A viewer’s particular phantasies will be complex and subject-based and no amount of tutoring, channelling and controlling by cinematic codes and conventions will buy them off totally. It is here that the space is opened up for a consideration of the fluid and contradictory processes of male identification in cinema and how passivity/activity is often the struggle of male identity in cinema, the problem of male phantasy.

It is also the space wherein the issue of whether male images can be considered as (direct) erotic objects for heterosexual male viewers or male characters between themselves. This is obviously the most important and interesting aspect of Neale's article and I find I have 'displaced' it in order to discuss the related issues of male identification and identity thus far. Again, to be brief, I find the problem with Neale's discussion is similar to the one about fluid and contradictory identification by and of the male viewer/character. That is, what *is* the erotic, the sexual in cinema? What is the material that could spark off erotic and sexual phantasies on the part of heterosexual male viewers? Given the wide-ranging and all-pervasive definitions that Freudian psychoanalysis gives to the sexual we should be very cautious about what the 'norm' might be in cinema (and anywhere else). If, as I suggested earlier, the norms are defined in relation to woman as sexual object and the presence of the sexual in terms of representations of genital intercourse, then any 'departure' from these – male bonding, male sartorial beauty, male-to-male violence in westerns, epics and war films – is by definition a displacement, a repression, perverse, and so on. But this argument in itself tends to displace the considerations of representability of the erotic and above all what any male viewer might be phantasising about as he watches male images display themselves on the screen.

I am not sure I wish to question Neale's argument beyond this – no more, at least, than to reassert my earlier point that it is precisely psychoanalysis that has made me question, re-think what the 'erotic' might be, what it is that can be invested with erotic meaning in the cinema. I think Neale in taking up the argument has held back on these questions, for instance, in glossing Willemsen's argument about Mann's films: 'in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed'¹⁸. I am not sure what this *explicit* looking would or could be anyway, *outside of any particular phantasy scenario*, or what this erotic component *is* that has been repressed. For example, I think the looks exchanged between the male characters in Peckinpah's films such as *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and especially *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973) are often marked as erotic, as are the bodies to which gazes are directed (by the characters and by men in the audience). The issue is that this eroticism is bound up in a heterosexual male scenario whereby mutual gunplay, rivalry, admiration, sartorial elegance *are erotic* (or can be), not a displacement of it, as people readily acknowledge about westerns.¹⁹ Is this not one reason why many heterosexual men find the western 'exciting', a genre noted for its relative absence of women who otherwise might bear the active male look?²⁰ Again this might be 'homosexual voyeurism (almost always repressed)' (Willemsen) in some technical sense. But contemporary concerns should require us to differentiate this from some kind of gay eroticism, as I imagine many gay men will find little interest in what are manifestly heterosexual phantasies about heterosexual men (together).

¹⁸ Steve Neale, op cit, p 8.

¹⁹ Of course, *all desire* is a displacement of..., a repression of....

²⁰ And as Mulvey notes: 'the active homosexual eroticism of the central male figures can carry the story without distraction.' – 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', op cit, p 11.

Thus when Neale, again drawing upon Willemsen, says, 'the repression of any explicit avowal of eroticism in the act of looking at the male seems structurally linked to a narrative content marked by sado-masochistic phantasies and scenes'²¹, I would be interested in turning this around by saying that a narrative content marked by sado-masochistic phantasies and scenes is just as likely to be an explicit avowal of eroticism in the act of looking at the male.

If, as Neale hopes, a discussion of the representation of masculinity is to be continued, then a discussion of male sexuality and the contradictions of masculine identity within representation has to be opened up and acknowledged as being quite explicitly ... there.

THE MAGAZINE OF THE INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO MAKERS ASSOCIATION

£1.25

VIEWS
ISSUE 1 SUMMER 1984

Contents

- Interview with Sandra Horne (ACTT Equality Officer)
- Cable Dossier
- Cultural Industries – What Are They? (Nick Garnham)
- Arguments For Independence – Berlin Roundtable with Fizzy Oppe, Alan Fountain, Kraft Wetzel, Stewart McKinnon, Paul Marris, Jenny Woodley, Roger Shannon, Barrie Ellis-Jones.
- Video & the Labour Movement (Dave Robertson)
- WFTVN (Tammy Walker)

SUBSCRIBE TO VIEWS!!!!!!

Published 4 times a year

£5.00 Britain individuals
£7.50 Britain institutions
£10.00 Britain supporting subs
£7.50 individuals abroad
£10.00 institutions abroad

All the above – Post free

Single copies:

£1.50 Britain
£2.00 abroad

Cheques to be made payable to
'VIEWS' 79 Wardour Street.
London W1V 3PH
Tel 01-439-0460.

THE CLOWN-PRINTS OF COMEDY

FRANK KRUTNIK CONSIDERS THE COMEDIAN COMEDY

THE QUESTIONS I will be addressing here concern the extent and nature of the much-noted 'disruptiveness' of comedy in relation to a tradition of film comedy which attempts to incorporate the performance skills of recognised comedians within the framework of the mainstream narrative film. From the outset I must stress that this work is tentative, hampered most significantly by the lack of as rigorous a study of particular films as I would like. However, as the most valuable work on comedy to date has been similarly generalised and tentative, I will fall back on the old disclaimer by stressing that my findings here represent 'work in progress'.

Certain forms of comedy are felt to be potentially disruptive to the operations of the 'classical' fiction film, with the key features of the latter including the structuring of conflict through a coded realism of character and action, illusionism, and a rhetorical mode which produces the fiction as seemingly autonomous. Here, for example, is Christian Metz's influential view:

¹ Christian Metz, 'Story/Discourse', *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p. 91.

*the traditional film is presented as story [histoire], not as discourse [discours]. And yet it is discourse... but the basic characteristic of this kind of discourse, and the very principle of its effectiveness as discourse, is precisely that it obliterates all traces of the enunciation, and masquerades as story.*¹

² For example: Mary Ann Doane, *The Dialogical Text*, photocopied PhD thesis, University Microfilms International, 1979, p. 2.

However, as several writers have noted², this conception of the 'classical film' is only a partial account, slighting most obviously the musical and the type of comedy to be discussed here, both of which inscribe performance conventions from other media and tend, if only in 'bracketed' moments, towards the exhibitionist, and hence discursive, rather than the voyeuristic and historical.³ The concept of the 'classical film' adhered to by Metz and others seems only directly applicable to the dramatic or action genres.

³ For further consideration of these terms, see Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'A Note On History/Discourse', in John Caughie (ed), *Theories Of Authorship*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul/British Film Institute, pp 232-241.

One can view comedy as representing an alternative fictional mode, its effectiveness often resulting from a play with the conventional fictional operations of the 'straight' genres. John Ellis and Steve Neale have proposed a useful dichotomy between two tendencies in comedy:

(a) 'Crazy' or 'Formal' Comedy 'which is aware of language and works by deconstructing it and recombining it, the comedy of gags, of

illogicality and incongruity'⁴. A type of comedy associated with writer-director Frank Tashlin, and comedians and comedy teams like Charlie Chaplin and the Marx Brothers; and

(b) 'Social' or 'Situation' Comedy which has a more 'conventional', narratively-articulated problematic, proceeding 'by mapping the field of a socio-discursive order, a field whose nodal points tend constantly to be those of class and sexuality. The order is disturbed in order for its hierarchies to be re-arranged'⁵.

The differentiation here is on the basis of relative deviance from or adherence to the operating principles of the 'classical' dramatic/action film. But this differentiation should not lead to the claim that 'crazy' comedy is inherently more progressive, less hermetic than situation comedy. The main point about comedy, whatever form it takes, is that it provides the site for an *allowable* disruption of the fictional 'rules', allowable because the particularities of the disruption form a crucial part of the audience's expectations of the comedy-film and because the 'comic effect' itself relies not upon disruption alone but upon a dialectic between disruption and (re)ordering.

'Crazy' comedy has most consistently received attention recently in connection with the work of Frank Tashlin whose 'molecular', gag-structured films can be seen to extend the formal play of the Warner Brothers' animated cartoons. However, more representative of the bulk of 'crazy' comedies are the films of the Marx Brothers, Bob Hope, Danny Kaye, etc, which belong to a specifiable type of film comedy – by no means restricted to Hollywood – termed by Steve Seidman the 'comedian comedy'. Seidman's useful study⁶ – which provides the starting-point for my work here – suggests that many of the features which Paul Willemen ascribes to Tashlin's work⁷ are hardly specific to the Tashlin-text but are features of the comedian-comedy in general. The rest of this article is concerned with exploring the particular structurings of the dialectic of disruption and ordering in the comedian comedy.

The Comedian And Fiction

From the start, one must emphasise that the comedian functions in these films as a particular type of star. In any star vehicle one can indicate a tension between the requirements of the particular fiction and the signifying effects of the star-image (which exceeds the boundaries of the individual text).⁸ But there is an even greater 'pressure' on the side of the comedian *as a performer* rather than as a localised 'character', and this results – as in certain musicals – in a different kind of 'stabilising' of the star within the text than one finds in the dramatic/action genres. The comedian is marked within the text as having a privileged status compared to the other characters/actors: he is less fictionally integrated and has a relatively disruptive function in relation to the fictional world and its codes of behaviour and action. As Seidman indicates, the comedian is able to joke about the plot, about his co-stars (Bob Hope's quips about

⁴ John Ellis, 'Made In Ealing', *Screen Spring* 1975, vol 16 no 1, p 113.

⁵ Steve Neale, *Genre*, London, British Film Institute, 1980, p 24.

⁶ Steve Seidman, *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*, UMI Research Press, 1981.

⁷ Paul Willemen, 'Tashlin's Method: A Hypothesis', in Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen (eds), *Frank Tashlin*, Edinburgh, 1973.

⁸ cf John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, Chapter 6, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.

Bing Crosby, for example), and to address the camera/spectator 'directly'. The comedian seems to intervene between the overt fiction and the spectator, and Seidman sees as characteristic of the comedian comedy 'the frequency of revealing the narrative as a contrivance, and exposing the materiality of sound and image' (p 30)—a good example being Bob Hope's call for 'special effects' to extricate him from tricky situations in the 'Road' films. However, Seidman rather overstates his case by referring to the comedian as an 'enunciator' and hence ignoring the significance of the imbrication of performance traditions and the 'double narrative' which marks the comedian comedy—both of which I'll discuss below.

The comedian has not only a previously-defined extra-fictional image but an image which is established also in extra-cinematic terms. Most of the comedians had successful careers in other media before their first films: for example, Chaplin, the Marx Brothers and WC Fields were vaudeville performers; Bob Hope was a radio, and later television, star; and Danny Kaye, Jerry Lewis and Woody Allen all started in cabaret. The comedian's 'person' was initially established in a direct performance situation, where the comedian relied upon interaction with an audience (even in radio, where there would generally be an in-studio audience). A key expectation the spectator brings to a comedian comedy is to witness/participate in the performance—the 'act'—of the comedian, and this necessitates a certain compromise between the performance mode and the institutional requirements of the individual film. This is sometimes seen in terms of the latter constraining the former, the most notorious example being the familiar account of how the hit-and-miss vaudeville-skit format of the early Marx Brothers films became more structured after their work with Irving Thalberg at MGM, and in the process the 'anarchy' of the comedy team was controlled. But it is precisely the tension between performance and conventional narrative expectations which marks the specific mode of operation of the comedian comedy and describes a crucial aspect of its pleurability—the pull between the fictional and performance, the historical and the discursive.

Thus one of the most common ways of structuring such a film is to have the comedian placed in reference to a familiar, highly-coded genre, with the conventions of the genre serving as a 'backdrop'. Bob Hope is a particularly good illustration of this tendency, and a random sampling of his films indicates the frequency of such generic 'borrowing': *The Paleface* and *Son of Paleface* (western); *My Favourite Blonde* (spy thriller); *The Ghost Breakers* (horror); *Caught in the Draft* (army picture); and *The Princess and the Pirate* (swashbuckler). It is as if the comedian—the disruptive element in the smooth functioning of the genre—is dropped into the fictional world by accident and, like a playful child, proceeds to toy with its rules. The comedian refuses to act 'straight'—unlike the other characters in the film—or is incapable of doing so: usually placed actantially as hero, the comedian is from the start markedly deviant in terms of the generic register, a ludicrously 'misfit' hero. Thus two sets of expectations come into conflict: the comedian 'inter-

feres' with the ostensible fiction, the fiction 'constrains' the comedian. It is the play between the two which is responsible for much of the comedy.

The ostensible, 'straight' narrative features a conventional problematic, with tasks to be accomplished, villains to be eradicated, a narrative order to be restored. Take, for example, the beginning of *The Paleface*: Jane Russell plays a bandit who is sprung from prison by the federal authorities who want to enlist her aid to defeat a band of gun-runners. Already there is some sign of deviance—the location of Russell, a 'woman who could take care of herself', as hero—but it is a familiar deviance that can be coped with in terms of the fictional mode of the western. The film begins and continues in a conventional mode of action, but instead of the federal agent, who can set her on the trail of the villains, she meets Bob Hope's incompetent dentist 'Painless' Peter Potter. The narrative drive is halted, interfered with, by the first of Hope's typical comic routines, and from this point the film mediates between Hope's familiar comic persona and the generic narrative, the latter providing an ordering of the comedian's performance and also functioning precisely to be disrupted.

The comic effect in these films, then, derives in large measure from the comedian's deviance in terms of the generic functioning of the hero: Hope, for example, is in most ways the inverse of the typical western hero and the comedy elaborates his 'aberrant' characteristics—he is a show-off, a coward, useless at shooting, and continually fails to consummate his marriage to Jane Russell (a ruse perpetrated by her, with Hope as the dupe who cannot believe his luck—and then fails to have any). But of course, this 'deviance' is precisely the mark of the comedian's talent, his special status in the film—he is *playing* the misfit, playing with generic expectations, or at the extreme, playing for the sake of play itself (for example, there is no need to motivate many of Harpo Marx' antics—cutting off ties, cigars, etc—he just does them). The deviance of the comedian represents either a refusal (e.g. Harpo Marx) or an inability (e.g. Jerry Lewis) to conform to the role mapped out by and in the conventionally ordered fiction.

The codifications of the genre narrative (or conventional narrative logic in general terms) serve as the indices of a rule-bound fictional world, a diegetically-marked 'reality', a world of 'adults'. The comedian is placed as a child at play, and serves as the rupturing force of the rules of the 'adult' world—in the process demonstrating the conventional status of these rules. This rupturing, manifested most obviously through the 'gag', consists of action, behaviour, speech (e.g. the gibberish routines of Danny Kaye), even the body itself (e.g. the spasticity of Jerry Lewis). But this disruptiveness is contained by what Seidman identifies as the problematic of the comedian comedy, a problematic which holds force over and above that of the 'parodied' genre narrative ('parody' being a somewhat inappropriate term because of the extent to which these films *use* the genre rules rather than just abuse them).

Seidman sees the various types of film comedy to be motivated by a general 'dialectic between eccentric behaviour and social conformity',

and the comedian comedy operates this dialectic 'in terms of oppositions within the individual' (p64) rather than the externally structured oppositions which are found in the different types of situation comedy. He indicates that dominant fictional features of these comedies result from the problematising of individual/social identity:

Eccentric behaviour in comedian comedy is tied to the formation of a coherent personality. Thus, problems of individual evolution and cultural initiation demand a two-fold resolution: the disparate poles of the individual personality (which may be described basically as false self versus true self and/or childish self versus adult self) must first of all be merged before his social integration can be effected. (p64)

Not only is the comedian a misfit-hero, but he is also deviant in regard to more general 'rules' of identity and maturity. Seidman gives many valuable examples of the signs of this deviance: identity confusion is suggested through instances of dressing-up (e.g. Woody Allen as the robotic servant in *Sleeper*), cross-dressing (e.g. Bob Hope in *The Princess and the Pirate*), the feigning of madness (Hope again, in *My Favourite Brunette*), dual roles which suggest an unresolved personality (e.g. Danny Kaye in *Wonder Man* and *On the Riviera*, Jerry Lewis in *The Nutty Professor*, *The Family Jewels* and *The Big Mouth*), the preference for play and phantasy over action (especially Kaye in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and Allen in *Play It Again, Sam*) and general childishness is suggested through regressive tendencies, inarticulacy and lack of sexual knowledge.

The comedian, then, is figured forth as a locus of confusion, and the 'unresolved personality' comes into conflict with those fictional pro-



Left, Woody Allen as the robotic servant in *Sleeper* and Bob Hope in drag in *The Princess and the Pirate*.

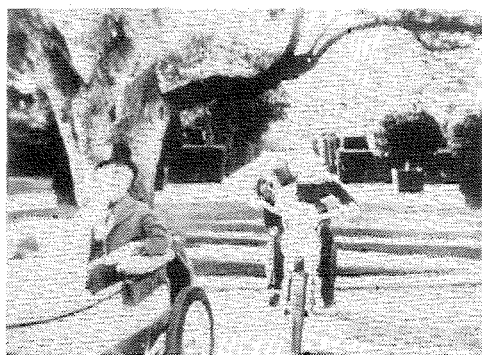
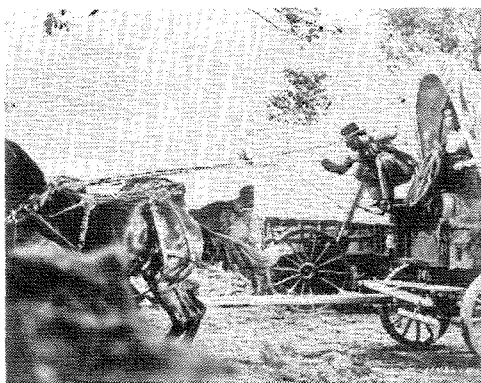


Danny Kaye to the phantasy rescue in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*.

cedures which are concerned with resolving these aberrations and 'fixing' the comedian's persona in terms of the narratively articulated problems and the generic field. If the comedian defeats the villains and gets the heroine he achieves 'maturity' and coherence by actually becoming the hero. In *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, for example, Danny Kaye is finally able to make his (largely genre-structured) phantasies come true when he (although inadvertently) foils a kidnap plot and gains the damsel-in-distress (Seidman, p 134). As a result, he is able to stand up to his mother, employer, and other characters who have bullied him into meekness and day-dreaming throughout the film. Such an ending represents the assimilation of the comedian into the cultural and fictional order, fixing him with a coherent identity (through the abolition of phantasy) and a mature sexuality (signalled by the reward of the bride). But not all such films end with this smooth imbrication of the comedian into the fiction and such a transparent resolution to the problematic of subjectivity, *The Paleface* being a case in point.

Two of the major areas of comic activity in this film are Hope's false assumption of his heroism (the result of Jane Russell's shooting skills) and the repeated failure of his attempts to bed Russell – every time he kisses her she knocks him out with her gun, an effect he puts down to the power of her kiss. Heroism and mature sexuality are strongly linked through the film – for example, in Hope's popularity with women when

he is acclaimed as an Indian fighter. Like *Walter Mitty*, *The Paleface* operates a clear division between role-playing and reality, and there is a similar combining of the two when Hope rescues Russell from the Indians and, in spite of his ineptitude, vanquishes the threat posed by the gun-runners. But instead of concluding in this manner, the film's coda stresses the comedy over the western. Hope and Russell are about to leave in their wagon, a 'happy honeymoon' placard on its side. Hope is ready to drive off, but – in reference to a running-gag in the film where he fails to lead the wagon away but is himself pulled off by the horses (similar to *Duck Soup*'s motorcycle-sidecar gag) – Russell herself takes over the reins and is pulled away by the horses, and out of the film. Sitting on the wagon, Hope turns, looks into the camera, and cracks: 'What do you want, a happy ending?'



Bob Hope unseated in *The Paleface* (left) and the similar sidecar gag in *Duck Soup*.

It is a quite typical ending for a Bob Hope film – he loses the woman and remains unintegrated – and to call the film 'subversive' would be inappropriate. It simply represents a victory for the comedian over the fiction, the 'child' over the 'adult', play over the demands of reality. In general, comedy suggests a lack of seriousness, a game played with the rules of the dramatic, the fictional, and language. *The Paleface* ends with a gag which extends the comic pleasure beyond the narrative wrap-up, and celebrates the comedian who is the agent of the comic disruptive-ness. Comedian comedies in general allow such pleasures in seeing the child-like comedian bending the rules of 'adult' fiction, faking achievement, and bluffing his way through the complexities of life – and this pleasure is intensified through the ultimate 'struggle' between comedian and fiction. *The Paleface*, of course, allows both narrative closure and the dominance of the comedian – the latter feeding off the former.

There is another aspect of the film's final gag which merits attention. It is the only joke in the film which is at the woman's expense. Throughout the film the woman represents a sexual troubling, a fracturing and confusion. At the beginning, Russell displaces the active hero: she is a 'masculine' woman – dressed as a man, a bandit – in comparison to whom Hope seems sexually inadequate ('Mr and Mrs "Painless" Peter Potter', he announces as they join the wagon-train. 'I'm mister'). In

relation to Hope she is located as 'father' and 'mother' ('You poor kid, I'm sorry I had to do that' she says tenderly after knocking him unconscious), but she is also – conventionally – the object of desire. Thus, the ending of the film also serves to eject the woman: it is through so doing, in fact, that the familiar Hope persona can be maintained. The film refuses the final integration of the comedian by refusing women (as does, for example, *Duck Soup* in the final pelting of Margaret Dumont), and thus sexual difference; it is in this way that the comedian can be left as a 'child', by avoiding the problem of sexual placement. Molly Haskell's caustic comments on the misogyny of 'knockabout' comedy are also relevant here, particularly her suggestion that the male comedy duo – Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, Martin and Lewis – signifies the exclusion of heterosexuality for a latently homosexual 'union of opposites (tall/short, thin/fat, straight/comic) who, like husband and wife, combine to make a whole'⁹. The sexual specificity of the comedian comedy, though, is most blatantly indicated by the veritable absence of *female* comedians.

⁹ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence To Rape*, London, New English Library, 1974, p 66.



Sexual confusion: Jane Russell as the 'masculine' bandit in *The Paleface*.

¹⁰ cf Sylvain du Pasquier, 'Buster Keaton's Gags', *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol 3 no 2, 1973.

¹¹ cf the discussion of such gags in Jean-Paul Simon/Daniel Pecheron, *Lectures du Film*, Paris 1975.

¹² Mick Eaton, 'Laughter in the Dark', *Screen* vol 22 no 2, 1981, pp 21-28.

The claim for the progressiveness of 'crazy' comedy has thus to be considered in terms of how comedy in general permits disruptiveness. A 'gag', for example, can be seen to rupture fictional engagement¹⁰, but gags are in themselves mini-narratives with their own comprehensible mode of suspense: the banana-skin gag, for example¹¹, is 'set up' well in advance, the spectator being made aware of the location of the banana-skin, the relative position of the 'victim' and hence the general narrative outcome which is the combination of the various parts. Although the resulting laughter testifies to a lack of engagement within the fiction, this is hardly disruptive in any real sense, but rather it is precisely the expected, highly familiar effect of comedy. As I have argued, comedy represents an alternative mode to the dramatic/action genres – and other features of its 'work' include an emphasis upon the topical, the lightweight, and the very familiarity of comedy routines – and must not be conceptualised in terms of the fictional procedures of these 'straight' genres. Rather than the engagement which dramatic/action films seek, comedies involve a different positioning of the spectator, revealing not just a tendency towards distanciation, but more accurately a play between engagement and distanciation. Comic pleasure is, furthermore, increased by the amount of 'risk' involved, by seeing how far the disruptive effect of comedy can be moved into transgression before it is 'pulled back'.

A good example of this occurs in the 1952 Hollywood sex comedy, *It Started with a Kiss*. Glenn Ford is pursuing the obstructive gold-digger Debbie Reynolds; having met her in a nightclub, he kisses her and her sexual resistance 'magically' vanishes (as is common in such comedies). She is unsteady, stunned, out of breath, but she smiles and then kisses him repeatedly. Smoke begins to waft up from below and the image blurs, refocussing with the camera panning across a floor strewn with discarded clothes (again, a familiar sex-comedy feature – as at the end of *Bachelor in Paradise*, a Bob Hope situation comedy). The camera continues panning across the floor and then up to the bed, fixing upon two hands on the sheets, a man's on top of a woman's. The disruption here is concerned with the possibility of extra-marital sex, a blatant transgression of the Production Code. But once the possibility is suggested, it is rapidly disproved: the man's hand pulls away from the woman's to reveal a ring on her finger. The joke is that the elision of the wedding scene has resulted in a 'false' expectation of transgression on the part of the spectator, and the climax of the gag – the exposure of the ring – is the moment when this expectation is confronted and the spectator reviews and 'corrects' it. The comic pleasure is here inextricably linked to a re-placement of transgression in relation to ideology, a re-setting of the boundaries. This example illustrates a point made by Mick Eaton,

*Even if there is always some element of transgression of the codes of conventional logic, conventional propriety, conventional film and television forms . . . the possibility of illumination is nevertheless ultimately dependent on our knowledge and recognition of that logic, that propriety, those conventional forms.*¹²

So what one has to take into account, as Eaton continues, is the 'pull between the transgression of the familiar and the familiarisation of the transgression'.

Comedy represents a game played with transgression and familiarity, and in the comedian-comedy the disruptiveness is familiarised by the location of the comedian within a problematic of identity, a fictional structuring which supercedes the ostensible, conventional narrative. Comedy relies upon the spectator being aware that he/she is actually viewing a comedy and is thus in a certain 'attitude': thus, for example, the confusions resulting from Woody Allen's 'straight' role in *The Front*, and more significantly *The King of Comedy*¹³, which plays with our expectations of a comedy just as the comedian-comedy plays with our expectations of the 'straight' genres, the trouble being that the comedian-misfit is played by 'straight' actor Robert De Niro and is patently unfunny and hence embarrassing. (Just think of what our attitude to Bob Hope would be at the end of *The Paleface* if his loss of Jane Russell were not made into a joke!) In *The King of Comedy* the 'play' is serious, and painful, and guilty. It is the inverse of a film like *The Paleface*: the final rejection of the 'adult' in the Hope vehicle coheres both with the comedian's persona and with the child-like attitude of receptivity that such films rely upon. Hope's final look at the camera is the look of the 'naughty' child seeking approbation from us for his daring refusal to take things seriously. The comedian must either become 'adult' by becoming integrated or remain regressively escapist, the latter a 'revolt' which cannot be taken seriously but is excused by the 'specialness' of the comedian 'putting on his act'.

¹³ I am indebted to Steve Neale for bringing the relevance of this film to my attention.



Robert De Niro (right) and Jerry Lewis reverse roles for *The King of Comedy*.

CORPORATE OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL IN THE CONTEMPORARY US FILM INDUSTRY

A REPORT BY DOUGLAS GOMERY

MOVING TOWARD THE mid-point of the 1980s, it seems to be 'business-as-usual' for the US film industry. As expected, of the more than 150 films released in 1983, only a handful were able to make sizeable profits. First place in the industry's race toward millions was garnered by Twentieth Century-Fox's *Return of the Jedi*. This entry in the *Star Wars* saga moved into second spot in the list of all-time rental champions, and, as with all the so-called 'mega-hits' of recent years, was able to accumulate 75 per cent more revenues than any other feature on 1983's list of top ten grossers: *Tootsie* (Columbia), *Trading Places* (Paramount), *War Games* (MGM/UA), *Flashdance* (Paramount), *Superman III*, (Warner Brothers), *Mr. Mom* (Twentieth Century-Fox), *Staying Alive* (Paramount), *Octopussy* (MGM/UA), and *48 Hours* (Paramount). Yet during 1983 a majority of releases of the major US movie corporations failed to match projected levels of return. For example, 'high-tech' vehicles such as *Blue Thunder* and *The Right Stuff* lost millions for Columbia and Warners respectively. Feature film production continued to be a business in which a few feature film releases earned a great deal of money, while the majority made little or no profit.¹

But in the 1980s it has not been 'business-as-usual' for corporate ownership and control. Indeed, the '80s have been witness to the greatest flux in corporate merger and takeover in two decades. Likewise there have been significant shifts in business strategy leading to transformations not seen since the turbulent days of the '50s. The following analysis will examine the nature of these corporate transfigurations for the US motion picture industry's six major corporations: Columbia, Twentieth Century-Fox, Warner Brothers, MGM/UA, Universal and Paramount.

The new wave of ownership change in the US movie business began in May, 1981, when MGM announced it would acquire the United Artists

¹ 'Big Rental Films of 1983', *Variety*, January 11, 1984, p 13.

Corporation from conglomerate giant, Transamerica. This represented a takeover of one film company by another. It began a year earlier when the former Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Incorporated, was split into two companies, MGM Film and MGM Grand Hotels, Inc. MGM Film, after more than a decade of producing only four or five relatively small budget films per year, began to increase production. United Artists, under a ten-year agreement that was scheduled to run through the end of 1983, had been distributing MGM Film's movies in the US. Since, at the time of the takeover, MGM Film had no international distribution network of its own, the merger was necessary if MGM was to try to become again a major player in the film business.²

A second significant ownership change took place the very next month, in June, 1981, with oilman Marvin Davis' acquisition of Twentieth Century-Fox. This represented an example of a very rich individual buying a medium-sized corporation, an action quite similar to Howard Hughes' purchase of RKO in 1948. Davis immediately took Fox private, so he would not have to be responsible to stockholders, nor have to report his actions to the US Securities and Exchange Commission. Twentieth Century-Fox became the first major Hollywood corporation to be run as a private firm since United Artists went public in 1952. Once Davis had consolidated this power, he fired the current production team, led by Sherry Lansing, and brought in a crew loyal to him, led by Joe Wizen. So far, Davis has been willing to inject Twentieth Century-Fox with cash derived from his other corporate assets, notably oil wells. He has also begun to sell more studio property and pump those proceeds into increased film production. Accurate financial data is now impossible to uncover, but all Wall Street reports indicate that Twentieth Century-Fox continues to grow by concentrating on producing and distributing films for theatrical release and a small number of television programmes.³

A third takeover occurred some six months later when Coca-Cola announced it would purchase Columbia Pictures for approximately 820 million dollars. This takeover represented diversification by a giant single-line corporation. Coke had seen its sales of soft drinks level off as its baby boom consumers grew up, and for several years had considered alternative ways to expand. Coke's executives were familiar with the television industry through the corporation's heavy use of advertising, and expected that cable television – in all its variants – would become a market which would expand rapidly. Columbia had just come off the Begelman scandal, but owned a valuable library of feature films and television programmes. Realising it could not form its own movie and television production company, Coke simply purchased one which was available.⁴

Although no actual mergers or takeovers have taken place since these three, for the last year and a half there has been a series of on-going attempted takeovers. The first, as with Columbia and Coca-Cola, involved the interplay of corporate giants. During the '70s Warner Brothers, a movie (and television) producer and distributor, was folded into a billion dollar media conglomerate, Warner Communications. Through acquisitions and investments, Warner Communications amassed a stake in

² Stephen J Sansweet, 'MGM Film Bid to Buy United Artists Marks Push For Fast Success', the *Wall Street Journal*, May 18, 1981, pp 1, 14; Katharine Macdonald, 'Reshaping the Studio', the *Washington Post*, August 9, 1981, pp L1, L7; 'MGM Film Signs Accord to Acquire United Artists Corporation', the *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 1981, p 2; US Securities and Exchange Commission, Form 10-K for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Film Co for Fiscal Year Ended August 31, 1981, Commission File Number 1-7962, p 1.

³ 'Marvin Davis' New Scenario for Fox', *Business Week*, May 30, 1983, p 38; US Securities and Exchange Commission, Form 10-K for Twentieth Century-Fox Corporation for Fiscal Year Ended August 28, 1982, Commission File Number 1-3695, pp 1-3.

⁴ John Huey and Stephen J Sansweet, 'Coca-Cola to Pay Over \$820 Million For Movie Firm', the *Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 1982, p 2; Tim Metz, 'Cost of Acquiring Columbia Pictures a Slippery Subject', the *Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 1981, p 37; Stephen J Sansweet, 'Possible Profit From Pay-Per-View TV May Be Partly Why Coke Wants Columbia', the

Wall Street Journal, January 29, 1981, p 31; US Securities and Exchange Commission, Form 10-K for the Coca-Cola Company for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 1982, pp 1-3.

everything from computers and video games to the New York Cosmos professional soccer team and *Mad* magazine. A joint venture with financial giant American Express positioned Warner as a major force in the expanding cable television industry. Extensive music and publishing interests rounded out what several Wall Street analysts argued had become the 'perfect' media conglomerate.

In 1982, Warner's profits began to level off and then decline. Its video game/computer division, Atari, took a nose dive into red ink; for the year 1983, Atari accumulated a mammoth 536 million dollars in losses. But all the negative press about Atari has masked how well Warner Brothers, the film and television division of the larger Warner Communications empire, had done during the '80s. In 1983, it contributed millions to Warner Communications' ledgers with such hits as *Risky Business*, *Sudden Impact*, and *National Lampoon's Vacation*. All were added to Warner's vast film library which is presently valued at more than 500 million dollars.

It was this growing library which attracted the interest of Australian media baron Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch has long wanted to enter the direct satellite-to-home television market, and knew he needed filmed material to do so profitably. Warner Brothers could provide the necessary films. So late in 1983, Murdoch, then owner of some 7 per cent of Warner's outstanding stock, announced he would try to take over majority control of the corporation. As he had done with newspapers and magazines, he planned to fire the current management and insert his own, more loyal, staff. Steven J Ross, the architect of the Warner Communications empire, and its chief operating officer, understandably began to resist this takeover. In a complicated financial transaction, Ross swapped stock with Chris-Craft, no longer a boat manufacturing company but the owner of several television stations in the US. This manoeuvre stymied Murdoch for a variety of financial and legal reasons. However, he kept up the pressure until Ross offered him 180.6 million dollars for his stock. Warner Communications survived, but given the continual losses piling up in Atari, no one is sure when another takeover attempt might be mounted, by a force even more powerful than Murdoch's 1.4 billion dollars News Corporation.⁵

As 1983 turned into 1984 there was an attempt to take MGM/UA private—a move modeled on Marvin Davis' actions at Twentieth Century-Fox. The '80s had seen prosperity return to MGM/UA. For the fiscal year which ended August 31, 1983, MGM/UA reported net income of 41.8 million dollars (on revenues of 723 million), a more than 50 per cent increase over the 1982 figure. Debt was reduced substantially and a new production staff, led by Frank Yablans, former president of Paramount, came on board. Kirk Kerkorian, long-time dominant stockholder of MGM and later MGM/UA, proposed to take this growing enterprise for his own, and made the stockholders an offer. When Wall Street analysts reacted negatively to the proposed terms, he quickly withdrew his overture. But few doubt that when conditions are more favourable (perhaps when the corporation is not doing as well), Kerkorian will make another

⁵ Michael Schrage, 'Warner's Transformation', the *Washington Post*, January 4, 1984, pp C7, C14; Leslie Wayne, 'The Battle for Survival at Warner', the *New York Times*, January 8, 1984, pp F1, F29; Merrill Brown and Michael Schrage, 'Murdoch's Goal: Warner Films', the *Washington Post*, January 10, 1984, p D7; Merrill Brown and Michael Schrage, 'Two Adversaries: Proud, Self-Made, and Different', the *Washington Post*, February 12, 1984, pp G1, G7, G9; Bill Abrams and Laura Landro, 'Warner's Plan to Buy Back Shares From Murdoch Boosts Chris-Craft', the *Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 1984, pp 35, 38.

offer and then take MGM/UA into his own hands.⁶

Even relatively tiny Disney studios has not been exempt from a take-over attempt. The corporation has not been doing well with its theme parks and movies in recent years, and many Wall Street analysts had long speculated that an outsider might try to acquire the company. Such an action began during the spring of 1984. Financier Saul Steinberg, through his New York-based Reliance Financial Services Corporation, began to purchase more and more stock. The Disney directors, like their counterparts at Warner Communications, responded by creating more stock, thus diluting Steinberg's holdings. As of the writing of this article (May, 1984) the matter has yet to be resolved but the attempt remains a serious one, and will use up a share of the corporation's resources.⁷

Marvin Davis and (if and when they are successful) Kirk Kerkorian and Saul Steinberg have tried to return important movie corporations to a model of one-man corporate control, a throwback to entrepreneurial trends of the nineteenth century. Davis has continued to run Twentieth Century-Fox as a single line corporation, producing and distributing movies in a variety of markets. He has kept his other ventures separate. But nothing prevents him from consolidating or diversifying in the future. And if Kerkorian and Steinberg gain control of MGM/UA and Disney, it is not clear what they might do. When Howard Hughes acquired RKO during the late 1940s, he simply ran the corporation into the ground and only recouped his losses when he broke the corporation into parts and sold them off. It would seem foolish for modern day tycoons to follow Hughes' example, but once they establish total control, there is nothing to prevent similar (or other bizarre) activities.

Far clearer are the examples where a publicly held corporation takes charge of a publicly held major film corporation. For such an instance, at least some minimal responsibility must be maintained toward the stockholders. Also, corporate manoeuvring must be done in the open, enabling financial analysts and reporters to inform stockholders.

Such has been the case with Coca-Cola's purchase of Columbia Pictures. Coke had wanted to expand its empire, and its corporate executives were convinced that there was no better way to sell a product – any product – than through modern, scientific marketing practice. Since 1982, Coke has been testing the proposition that it can sell movies like soft drinks. Its first step was to expand Columbia's product line. Coke knew any immediate increase would be resisted by theatre owners who would not want to grant Columbia's bookers twice the number of Christmas and summer slots and somehow lose favour with the other major film corporations. So Columbia formed a 'new' studio, Tri-Star.

Tri-Star is a joint venture with Time, Inc, owner of the dominant pay-television network, Home Box Office (hereafter HBO), and CBS, long the dominant over-the-air television network in the USA. Of course, Tri-Star is not really a new studio, but rather an extension of long-established Columbia Pictures. Columbia will handle all the booking mechanics; HBO and CBS guaranteed partial financing and full access to their networks, thus maximising income from these important markets. Not

⁶ Rena Kleimar, 'MGM/UA Going Private?', *Hollywood Reporter*, December 20, 1983, pp 1, 38; Stephen J Sansweet, 'MGM/UA Gets \$665 Million Bid to Go Private', the *Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 1983, p 4; 'Kerkorian Changes His Mind', *Business Week*, January 30, 1984, p 32; 'The Lion and the Fox', *Forbes*, April 23, 1984, p 44.

⁷ Frederick M Muir, 'Steinberg Firm Buys 6.3 Percent Stake in Walt Disney', the *Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 1984, p 4; Stephen J Sansweet, 'Steinberg Plans To Boost Stake in Walt Disney', the *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 1984, p 3; Bill Johnson, 'Disney To Pay \$200 Million in Stock for Firm', the *Wall Street Journal*, May 18, 1984, p 7.

surprisingly, then, Tri-Star seems to be off to a successful start. In May, 1984, it opened its first feature, *The Natural* starring Robert Redford. Reviews were favourable and early box office returns promising.

But over the years many others have tried to create new studios (even the powerful US television networks) and failed. Tri-Star faces significant problems. Can the three partners – with their conflicting goals – remain united? Will theatre owners accept Tri-Star's 20 new offerings at the same time that the six majors are stepping up their own production? Will important stars and producers move to Tri-Star, away from the security of the six majors? The real test of this new concern will come in 1985 when it has exhausted its initial supply of features (with stars such as Redford) and begins to offer more marginal products. If film history offers any prediction, the company can only survive if Columbia – with its world-wide distribution network – is willing to sacrifice part of its own production schedule and absorb Tri-Star as a satellite operation.

Coke has also begun to alter Columbia's traditional theatrical marketing practices. In the past Columbia often 'overspent' on advertising, wiping out potential profits. For example, the millions of dollars spent for promotion of *Gandhi* eliminated nearly all profits from US bookings. Coke is seeking ways to use advertising dollars more effectively by testing market response to increased television advertising expenditures for a feature film in one market while it is reducing it in others which have similar *a priori* expectations of the potential audience for the film.

From now on, Columbia will seek out only 'heavy users of entertainment', and then 'concept test' possible film plots by sampling this audience. Such techniques have long been used by the television networks for their made-for-television films, but less so with Hollywood features which require 18 to 24 months lead time before release. Columbia's marketing experts are intensively studying the demand for feature films by focusing on the question of what price and release schedule will maximise combined revenues from box office receipts, plus pay-television revenues plus sales of video cassettes. By sampling some 19,000 consumers, and analysing the data, Columbia executives began to fine-tune release schedules.

Coca-Cola has modified Columbia's corporate behaviour in other ways. For example, by participating in Coke volume advertising discounts, Columbia can buy approximately 5 per cent more network television advertising time. If a movie flops so badly that additional television advertisements will not help, then the parent corporation can simply take them back and use them for other Coca-Cola products. In such a way, Columbia can execute far better advertising campaigns than the other major studios. Coke has even transferred advertisements to Columbia. For example, Coke had secured an advertising package from the ABC television network which turned out to include the made-for-television movie, *The Day After*. While some things might go better with Coke, the end of the world probably does not. So in this case, the parent company 'gave' the spots to Columbia to promote forthcoming feature films.

But Columbia's new marketing style has not won over many industry old timers. When Columbia president Frank Price resigned in October, 1983, Hollywood naysayers blamed it on unacceptable interference by new superiors installed by Coke. Why else would Price have exited early from a guaranteed (to 1985) contract which was worth some 10 million dollars? These traditionalists argue that movie-making and promotion is an art, not a science. Marketing feature films requires different skills than those associated with selling soap, toothpaste, or soft drinks. On the other hand, Columbia surely has achieved a measure of success in 1983, by making some 91 million dollars in profits from hits including *Educating Rita*, *Christine* and *The Big Chill*. Moreover, it should be noted that Frank Price probably left Columbia for a variety of reasons, the principal one being the formation of Tri-Star. Like many who have long toiled in Hollywood, Price regarded HBO as a powerful threat, not a corporation with which to form an alliance. Coke, however, had no history battling HBO; and as it was doing simultaneously with the introduction of Diet Coke, Coke believed a corporation ought to expand from strength. (After a year on the market, Diet Coke is now the third largest selling soft drink in the United States.)⁸

Columbia was not the sole major significantly to modify corporate behaviour during the '80s. The two giant US movie corporations not yet discussed – Universal and Paramount – also made significant alterations in corporate strategy. Universal, part of the media conglomerate MCA, hit a peak of corporate profitability in 1982 with the success of *E.T.* But none of the top ten films of 1983 (listed above) came from Universal. So when Frank Price left Columbia, few doubted he would return to the corporation for which he had successfully toiled for nineteen years.

In November, 1983, Price took charge of production at Universal and began to bring changes to this normally conservative giant. His strategy focused upon attracting 'name' talent into the Universal corporate orbit and then providing these persons with the resources with which to work. Thus in 1985 and 1986 Universal's production schedule – as well as the budgets for those films – ought to grow faster than that for rival majors. Price has a reputation of trying to spread risk as far as possible in order to create one or two 'mega-hits' per year. Finally, Price has centralised power at Universal, handling everything from script changes to the fine tuning of advertising and release schedules from his office.⁹

Universal dominates MCA. In contrast, Paramount functions as but one division of the multi-billion dollar conglomerate, Gulf + Western. In recent years Gulf + Western's operations have included the creation and distribution of clothing, home furnishings, cigars, financial services, machine tools, auto parts and sugar cane as well as the mining of zinc. But the person who fashioned this classical conglomerate, Charles Bluhdorn, died on February 19, 1983. His successor, Martin S Davis (not to be confused with Twentieth Century-Fox's *Marvin Davis*) has begun to restructure Gulf + Western. In the future, Gulf + Western will concentrate on three consumer-related businesses: financial services, clothing and furniture manufacture, and mass entertainment – including

⁸ Myron Magnet, 'Coke Tries Selling Movies Like Soda Pop', *Fortune*, December 26, 1983, pp 119-126; Mark Potts, 'Coca-Cola Giant "Has Awakened"', the *Washington Post* November 27, 1983, pp H1, H3-H6; Sandra Salmans, 'Tri-Star's Bid for Movie Stardom', the *New York Times*, May 13, 1984, III, pp 1, 12-13; Gary Putka, 'Coke Rallies as Analysts Reassess Stock's Value and Dollar Prospects in Foreign Trade', the *Wall Street Journal*, September 22, 1983, p 59; US Securities and Exchange Commission, Form 10-K for The Coca-Cola Company for Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 1983, Commission File Number 1-2217, pp 4-5.

⁹ Stephen J Sansweet, 'MCA Says Frank Price Named Chairman of Its Movie Group', the *Wall Street Journal*, November 14, 1983, p 47; Richard E Rustin, 'MCA Pushed Up by Buying Program of Investor Who Is Said To Be Hoping for Spin Off Land', the *Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 1984, p 61.

Paramount Pictures. The centrepiece of this 'new' Gulf + Western will be its Leisure Time Group, run by long-time Paramount Pictures chief executive Barry Diller.

Martin S Davis and Barry Diller have aggressively pushed Gulf + Western's Leisure Time Group into the markets of pay-cable television, video cassettes, video discs and video games. Paramount has begun to recycle movies (and television programmes) in as many forms as possible. As such it functioned as the leader in the plan of several of the major movie corporations to enter the pay-cable television business directly. The major motion picture corporations wanted to take direct control of distribution and presentation in that growing market, and not simply leave it to Time, Inc's Home Box Office. But the US Department of Justice would not approve the formation of such a combine. It would only allow a straight merger between the Warner-owned The Movie Channel, and the Viacom-owned Showtime. (Viacom is a media conglomerate which owns television stations and cable franchises in the US, and syndicates US television shows worldwide.)

So in December, 1983, Paramount took another tack in its continuing opposition to HBO and sold exclusive rights to Paramount features for the next five years to the recently merged Showtime/The Movie Channel. Showtime/The Movie Channel can now count on the aforementioned Paramount hits of 1983 including Oscar champion *Terms of Endearment*. This deal represents the first thrust by a major studio in what will be a continual fight to create a competitor equal to Time's powerful HBO.

During 1983 Paramount also expanded into other new 'television' markets. Examples are numerous. Paramount now produces and syndicates a daily television show which chronicles the news and gossip of the show business world – *Entertainment Tonight*. This programme is delivered to over-the-air television stations via satellite and thus can be as topical as any news offering. *Entertainment Tonight* frequently helps promote Paramount feature films and stars. Video games now regularly appear based on Paramount feature films. The most popular so far has been the *Star Trek* game. Finally Paramount has begun to initiate a series of 'cross-over' products. Although these may begin as motion pictures, they are designed to be easily converted into video games, video cassettes, and video discs. So, for example, Paramount's home video division financed the latest Cheech and Chong movie. Once released, if it becomes popular enough, it can quickly be turned into a successful cassette and disc for sale.

Yet it must be stressed that throughout this repositioning by Gulf + Western's Leisure Time Group, the basis for profit production has continued to rest with the feature film. The process still begins with a motion picture becoming a hit in its theatrical run. If it does not, usually sales by cassettes or discs will be minimal. But if Paramount can create a popular film, the possibilities for turnover in other markets increase tenfold. Look for Paramount's executives to attempt to exploit those new profit centres as much as possible in future years.¹⁰

Even Walt Disney, Inc, the strongest of the minor companies, has

¹⁰ Laura Landro, 'Paramount Pictures Pursues New Markets as Changes Confront Movie Firms', the *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 1983, p 33; David Hajda, 'Cable Showtime Buys Film Package', the *New York Times*, January 8, 1984, II, p 26; 'Showtime/TMC Inks Pact with Paramount', *Cablevision*, January 2, 1984, pp 18-19; Jeffrey A Trachtenberg, 'A Face in the Crowd', *Forbes*, April 9, 1984, pp 109, 114; US Securities and Exchange Commission, Form 10-K for Gulf + Western Industries For Fiscal Year Ended July 31, 1983, Commission File Number 1-5404, pp 9-11.

begun to adopt new corporate strategies during the '80s. For a number of years, Disney's motion picture division has been a drain on the corporation. Certainly, re-released feature-length animated classics continue to do well when presented to new generations of children. But newly created feature films have regularly flopped at the box office. In response, in 1983 Disney moved into more mainstream Hollywood film-making with features which would include 'provocative themes'. To differentiate these offerings Disney even created a new label, Touchstone films. So far Touchstone has been a success, albeit with only one release – *Splash*. In this feature Disney offered for the first time four-letter words and nudity. More films of this type are in production because the studio desperately wants to avoid the continuation of the likes of *Nightcross* (estimated loss of 10.5 million dollars), and *Tron* (estimated loss of 10.4 million dollars).¹¹

The 1980s have witnessed a crucial set of transformations in ownership and behaviour of the major US movie corporations. And more change is undoubtedly due before the close of the decade. But through all of this flux, the six major movie corporations continue to dominate. Consider the chart which lays out the rental shares of the major film corporations as percentages of total industry rentals for the United States and Canadian markets. This basic information again demonstrates that six firms have continually shared from 82 to 89 per cent of the market, just as they and their predecessor corporations did during the '60s and '70s. If Disney is added, the share moves to approximately 90 per cent.

¹¹ Thomas C Hayes, 'The Troubled World of Disney', the *New York Times*, September 25, 1983, III, pp 1, 12-13; 'Problems in Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom', *Business Week*, March 12, 1984, pp 50-51, 54; Gary Putka, 'Disney's Recent Buoyancy Tied to Assets Value By Some Who See a Ripeness for Takeover Bids', the *Wall Street Journal*, January 4, 1984, p 57; US Securities and Exchange Commission, Form 10-K for Walt Disney, Inc For the Fiscal Year Ended September 30, 1984, Commission File Number 1-4083, pp 1-5.

DOMESTIC MARKET SHARES: 1980-1983

	1983	1982	1981	1980
Universal	13%	30%	14%	20%
Paramount	14	14	15	16
Fox	21	14	13	16
MGM/UA	10	11	9	7
Warners	17	10	18	14
Columbia	14	10	13	14
All others	11	11	18	13

NOTE: These are US plus Canadian rentals only as estimated by *Variety* (January 18, 1984) from corporation disclosures and its own surveys.

Undoubtedly this consistent market power has driven entrepreneurs such as Marvin Davis and corporations such as Coca-Cola to purchase major movie corporations rather than start up their own. How, with all the changes analysed above, have these six corporations retained their enormous and continuing market power? The answer lies in their ability to maintain effective barriers to entry to their industry. I shall argue that the six are able to be so effective for two fundamental reasons: (1) econo-

¹² For more on these economic concepts see F M Scherer, *Industrial Market Structure and Economic Performance*, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1980.

mies of scale of distribution and (2) carefully manipulated use of the technique of price discrimination.¹²

The six major US movie corporations send their products to nearly every country on this planet. Such has been the case since the 1920s. Consequently, the six alone are able to take full advantage of economies of scale of distribution. No potential rival rationally ought to expend the resources necessary to mount a comparable world-wide network. Moreover, the major film corporations have effected even greater cost savings through cooperative distribution ventures abroad. In 1970, Paramount and Universal, for example, created Cinema International Corporation (CIC), now United International Pictures. In 1973, MGM (now MGM/UA) joined CIC. Frequently, the remaining three – Columbia, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warners – have shared offices in foreign countries. And all these cooperative actions, which might be questioned if they took place in a US setting, are legal under US law if they take place abroad.

The six major motion picture corporations gain a second set of relative advantages from their effective use of the economics of price discrimination. Economists define price discrimination as the ability of a firm to separate consumers into different markets and charge them different prices for identical goods or services. For movies, this would be a situation in which patrons would be willing to pay different prices to see the same movie. Once a feature film has been created, it behoves a corporation effectively to seek all possible revenues from exhibition since the extra costs of reproduction and distribution are relatively low. Consequently, more than 50 years ago, the major film corporations instituted a system of feature film release which would extract the maximum possible revenue by charging patrons different prices for the same film – as a function of when and where they saw the film.

The film industry has formalised admission price discrimination in terms of run, zone and clearance. A feature film opens (first run) in a number of theatres at top prices. A finite number of such situations will be utilised in any one market (a zone). Then, after a prescribed period of time (the clearance), the film can open in sub-run theatres – generally as part of a double bill – at lower prices. Subsequent runs, for even lower fees, come next with presentations on pay-television (generally on HBO, or Showtime/The Movie Channel), by sale through video cassette and video disc, through showings in revival houses, and with presentation for 'free' on commercial over-the-air television, first in prime-time and then in fringe periods (the 'early show', or the 'late show').

Such a release system enables the major movie corporations to charge different prices for the 'same' movie. The initial goal is to entice all possible consumers to stand in line to pay 5 dollars (or more in the US) to see the first run of a film. Since preferences for films are highly unpredictable, wide use of advertising works to encourage interest and to differentiate one film from all others in first run at the time. The pattern during the '80s has been that if a feature does well in its initial theatrical run, it will continue to do well through the remainder of the release schedule.

Thus, as long as the majors control the first-run market, they are able to create a barrier to entry through price discrimination since potential competitors could only make profits if they too developed a comprehensive distribution network for their feature films. As with the first reason described above, the least glamorous branch of the film business – distribution – provides the economic basis for market control.

So even though the 1980s has been a decade of great change on the level of corporate ownership and behaviour for the major US movie corporations, the underlying economics of the movie business have changed little. Two concepts remain fundamental, as they have for some 50 years: (1) economies of scale, and (2) price discrimination. Thus old and new owners of major movie corporations have been able to maintain control of traditional theatrical markets while moving into other presentation modes. These new markets simply add to the profits of the same six corporations. (Like many other long-established industries, the US movie business is more affected by swings in the relative state of the economic and long-term demographic shifts than challenges by new competitors.) The centrepiece of all 'new' strategies remains the feature film, first released in theatrical situation by six major corporations – whoever owns them. Selected rich persons, and even richer corporations, have recognised this fundamental fact and sought entry into the movie industry by trying (sometimes successfully) to acquire one of the six major movie corporations. Changes in the operating strategies of the six majors have simply sought out more efficient ways to extract profits for these six, regardless of who owns them. Thus, in all the recent flux there remains a fundamental continuity of the basic principles of movie economics.

enclitic 14

Articles on Critical Theory, Film, Literature, Politics and Ideology.

Thomas E. Lewis	<i>Aesthetic Effect/ Ideological Effect</i>
Kaja Silverman	<i>Histoire d'O: The Story of a Disciplined and Punished Body</i>
Maureen Turim	<i>Designs of Motion: A Correlation Between Early Serial Photography and the Recent Avantgarde</i>
Laura Oswald	<i>The Perversion of I/Eye in Un Chant d'amour</i>
Dana Polan	<i>The Ruin of a Poetics: The Political Practice of Prometheus Unbound</i>
Tom Conley	<i>The Other Scene: Walsh's Manpower</i>
Patricia Mellencamp	<i>Film History and Sexual Economics</i>
Marguerite Duras	<i>An Interview</i>
Alan Weiss	<i>Ideology and the Problem of Style: The Errant Text</i>
John O'Kane	<i>Framing the Sixties</i>
Sandy Flitterman	<i>From Déesse to Idée: Agnes Varda's Cleo From Five to Seven</i>
Kristin Ross	<i>Reading in the Imaginary: Artaud and Van Gogh</i>
Christopher Norris	<i>Philosophy as a Kind of Narrative: Rorty on Postmodern Liberal Culture</i>

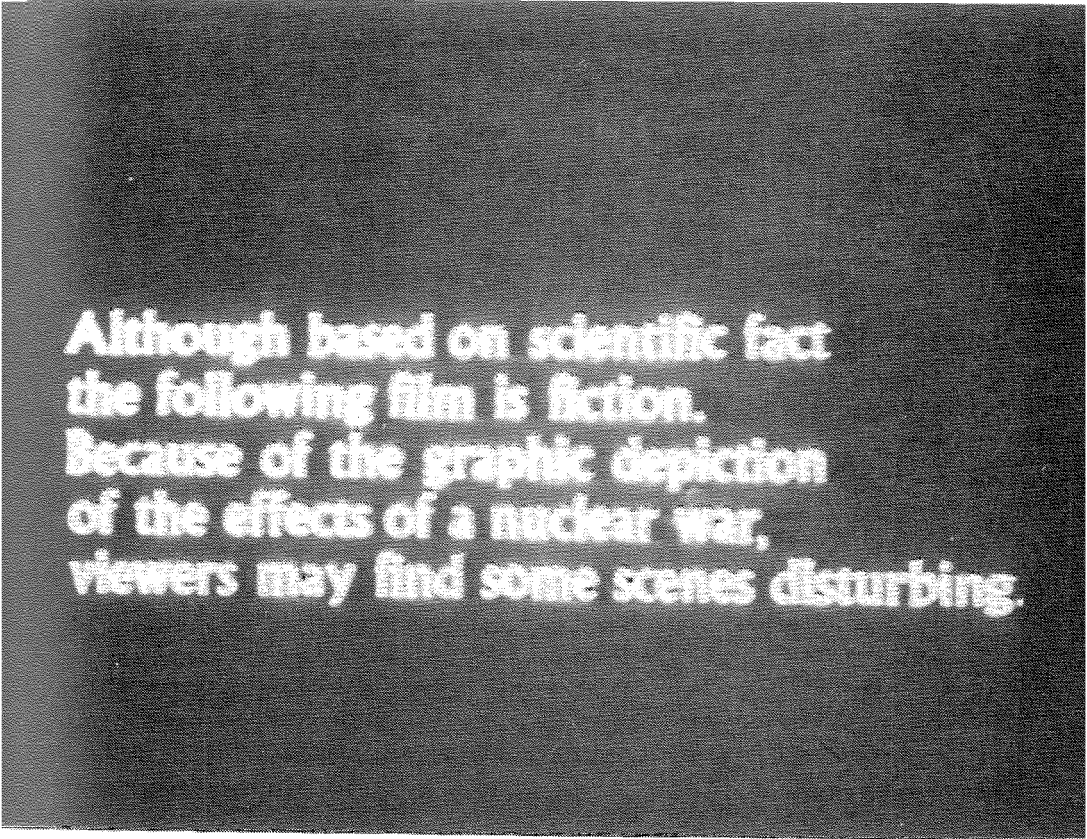
\$4.00

200 Folwell Hall
9 Pleasant St. S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455

enclitic

'THE DAY AFTER': REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST

BY SUSAN BOYD-BOWMAN



Although based on scientific fact
the following film is fiction.
Because of the graphic depiction
of the effects of a nuclear war,
viewers may find some scenes disturbing.

The caption which preceded US and UK transmission of *The Day After*.

THE BIGGEST AMERICAN media event of 1983 was the transmission of *The Day After*, (ABC-TV, Sunday, November 20, 1983), watched by an estimated half of the adult population. There had been weeks of advance publicity about the film, fuelled by White House

¹ Quoted by Jon Connell, 'Soap Opera Armageddon', the *Sunday Times*, December 11, 1983.

nervousness about its anti-nuclear 'bias'. ABC distributed a half-million 'viewer's guides' (with 30 topics for discussion) and *The Day After* teachings were organised by peace groups across the country.

Three weeks later the same film, trailing a thinner vapour of political controversy, hit Britain's ITV screens, and the detonation in public consciousness was not so much a bang as a whimper. A poll commissioned by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) estimated that although 17 million Britons saw part of it, only 5.4 million watched it in its two-hour entirety. Reviewers, critics and political commentators whined almost in unison: *The Day After* was a particularly tasteless example of the American penchant for soap opera, 'Peyton Place with a nuclear explosion', as a defence official put it¹. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) ran a recruitment advertisement in newspapers the following day, and the BBC promised that it would be doing the subject properly in a film for late 1984. The image of the mushroom cloud soon became a cliché in the welter of programmes around Orwell.

Why was *The Day After* so poorly received in a country with a large disarmament movement, much of which is still indignant over the BBC's near twenty-year refusal to transmit Peter Watkins's *The War Game*? Certainly American TV 'factions' have been one form of 'serious' television successfully exported across the Atlantic (viz *Roots*, *Holocaust*, *Washington Behind Closed Doors*). With the almost contemporaneous arrival of Cruise missiles in the UK, and a flare-up of acrimony around civil defense, the issue *ought* to have been hot enough to make *The Day After* a major media event over here too.

But in fact, the different reactions to the film are indicative not just of different political contexts for debate about The Bomb, but also of different national broadcasting cultures. Professional beliefs about what constitutes 'political' programme-making and aesthetic prejudices about 'the right way' to dramatise the end-of-civilisation-as-we-know-it – both of these informed the decisions of broadcasting executives and filmmakers. I believe that British broadcasting attitudes to such categories as tastefulness, realism, and objectivity explain why the BBC got cold feet about buying the film, and why ITV scheduled it unfavourably (on Saturday and in a trimmed version). Critical opinion in this country is of course hostile to American TV imports in general and to serial melodrama in particular, but resistance to this prestige one-off film can only be explained by European sensitivity to this particular subject. What, the critics implied, could America know of representing the effect of war on home soil?

This article will concentrate on the production and circulation of *The Day After*, drawing attention to differences between the versions transmitted in the UK and the US, and will analyse its amalgamation of various televisual and cinematic genres. I will also refer back to *The War Game* (1965) and to other recently transmitted representations of the aftermath of nuclear war, such as *QED: A Guide to Armageddon* (BBC,

1982) and *Z for Zachariah* (BBC *Play for Today*, 1983). As Julian Petley pointed out in his study of end-of-the-world movies of the 1950s and 60s², there are crucial ideological differences in scenarios of how the nuclear blast occurs, how social and political institutions break down, and which survival and moral codes the characters adopt: 'Nuclear warfare is the ultimate Big Theme, and as such is a fertile hunting ground for the film maker more concerned with meaningful statements and social consciences than with cinema.'³ The same is true of 1980s television. For the subject of a possible nuclear war poses problems of documentary-drama as a form (what does *realism* mean when dramatising something that hasn't happened?) as well as the problem of the ideological effectiveness of the media (does watching such a fiction somehow reconcile us to the actuality? Or do more than reinforce existing attitudes to an issue like the nuclear arms race?). Finally, are programmes about nuclear war the ultimate nightmare fantasy, and does watching them reassure us that *we* will survive? With respect to *The Day After*, is there a contradiction in the proposition that a TV movie which 'easily managed to subdue that difficult subject to the soothing norms of the medium'⁴ was also 'in political terms, the most powerful use of TV in American history'⁵?

I will argue that *The Day After* attempted to stretch the medium by recourse to a variety of TV and cinematic discourses, in the attempt to address a notional universal audience on the ultimate Big Theme, and that its relative failure in this country is a measure of the resilience of British broadcasting culture to American hegemony in popular television fiction.

I

I wanted to clobber sixty-million people over the head.

Nicholas Meyer, director of *The Day After*⁶

In the event, Meyer clobbered more like 100 million Americans with 'the most watched tele-movie in history', as the Yorkshire TV press release claimed. From the outset, *The Day After* was intended as a prestige film for international TV and theatrical release. As far as the American market was concerned, even allowing for the three networks' competitive search for made-for-TV movies on taboo subjects, it was still a political gamble, and aspired to aesthetic risks as well. Much of the publicity surrounding its production and protracted journey to the ABC screen was contingent on the attempt to elevate *The Day After* above the ratings war to the status of a project unique in TV history, and was based on an image of its makers as 'committed' to waking Americans up to the dangers of nuclear war. As I will argue, this partisanship is inscribed in the film, and is deeply antithetical to the 'neutral' stance of the British version of the drama-documentary form. Those responsible for *The Day After* steered an uneasy course between conflicting codes of documentary neutrality ('six months' research... recommended reading list') and

² Julian Petley, 'Waiting for the End', the *Movie* no 38, 1980, pp 752-755.

³ *ibid*, pp 752-3.

⁴ Peter Conrad, 'The Last Taboo', the *Observer*, April 1, 1984.

⁵ Edward Gorman, 'Day After Blitzed US Ratings', *Broadcast*, November 25, 1983, p 6.

⁶ Nicholas Meyer, quoted by Mark Gerzon, 'Watching the World End', the *Times*, November 7, 1983.

⁷ Nancy Banks-Smith, the *Guardian*, December 12, 1983.

⁸ Paul Newman, quoted by Mark Gerzon, *op cit.*

⁹ Brandon Stoddard, quoted *ibid.*

¹⁰ Nicholas Meyer, quoted *ibid.*

¹¹ Mark Gerzon, *op cit.*

the license of drama to advocate. In the end, as the confused reactions of the Cabinet politicians and TV studio chairmen in both the US and UK illustrate, it was difficult to decide whether Meyer and ABC had delivered 'not a political film, but fiction based on fact' (as they claimed), or disarmament propaganda (as their hawkish critics claimed), or a pretentious disaster movie ('as cliché-ridden a film as ever insulted its subject'⁷).

The hatching of the project is credited to the president of ABC Motion Pictures, Brandon Stoddard, who had produced *Roots*. He claims to have been inspired by the success of *The China Syndrome* at making box-office capital out of a topical issue. He had also seen *The War Game* and, like others who had considered such a project, was concerned with how to depict what a nuclear war would be like without getting the film banned from the airwaves as 'too terrifying', and without on the other hand glossing over its horrific effects. Paul Newman, who had for ten years contemplated a film on the subject, was quoted:

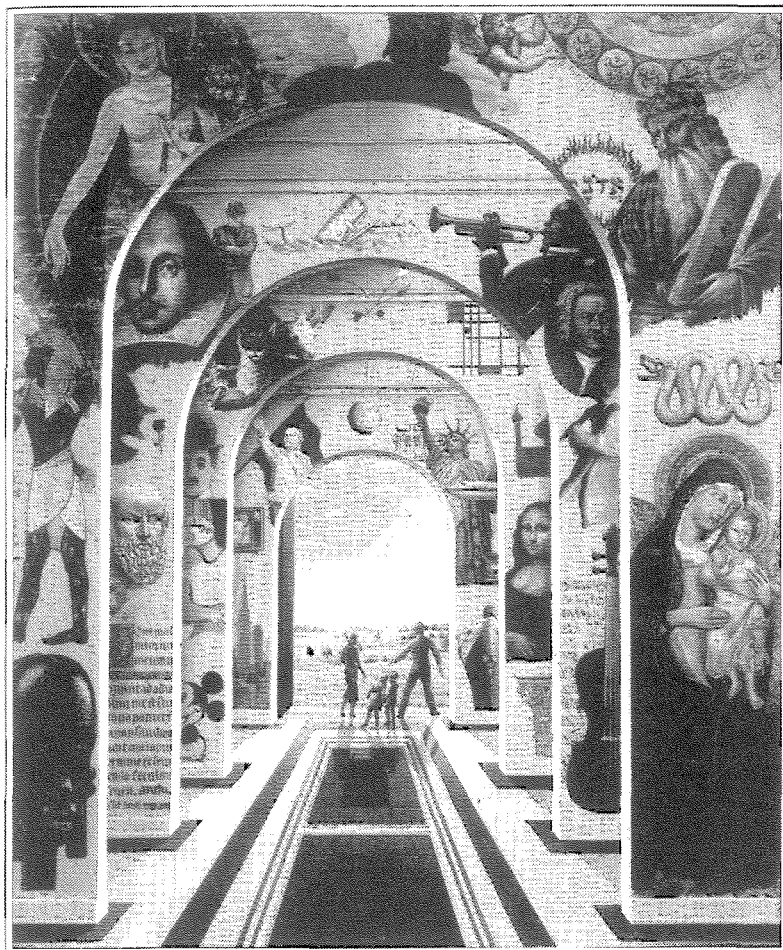
*If you write a bad melodrama, who cares? If you write a bad comedy, who cares? But if you write a film about an important subject it has to be absolutely impeccable. If it isn't it can hurt the whole movement.*⁸

When Stoddard went looking for a script, he wanted to avoid 'polemics' about superpower diplomacy:

*The story was not supposed to reach any conclusion except one: that nuclear war is horrible. . . . We wanted to be able to say: 'This is what it would be like.'*⁹

The idea that a simple approximation of verisimilitude in depicting the effects of a nuclear war on fictional civilians could in itself be radical, underlies the 'narrative image' of *The Day After*, though the director at times claimed a more specific political intention ('ABC is spending millions of dollars to go on the air and call Ronald Reagan a liar'¹⁰). The point is that ABC defined the production both in terms of realism—e.g. the special effects were backed-up with rosters of scientific advisors and technical consultants—and contradictorily, as art, a surrealist vision of the destruction of civilisation in the West, as the graphic design of the glossy press poster represents it. A nuclear family stands in the archway of an arcade emblazoned with symbols of Western culture, high and low, and watches three missiles arc over an idealised landscape. As I will argue, the film can be read as a projection of what might replace the nuclear family and the countryside as the ideological glue of American society.

Given the political and commercial risks, there was much speculation about ABC's motives in tackling the subject: 'Does Brandon Stoddard believe "The Day After" will get record ratings, or is the network trying to raise public consciousness about the reality of nuclear war?' asked Mark Gerzon in the *Times*.¹¹ Neither such opportunism nor such altruism would be attributed to a British television executive.



The destruction of Western civilisation, from the press poster of *The Day After*.

II

It precisely communicates one man's vision of disaster, and I cannot think that it is diminished as art because the vision happens to correspond with the facts. Like Michelangelo's 'Last Judgement', it proposes itself as an authentic documentary image of the wrath to come, though Michelangelo, of course, was working from data less capable of verification.

Kenneth Tynan on *The War Game*¹²

For the American producers in 1983 the problem was one of taste – the impact of horror on the sensitive – rather than the impact of a politically sensitive subject on the State, and this corresponds with the public

¹² Kenneth Tynan, the *Observer*, February 13, 1966.

¹³ Michael Tracey, 'A Nightmare Vision that Shook the BBC', the *Guardian*, September 1, 1980.

¹⁴ This and the above quotation are cited in Andrew Goodwin, Paul Kerr and Ian Macdonald (eds), *Drama-Documentary*, BFI Dossier 19, London, British Film Institute, 1983, p 85.

¹⁵ February 2, 1966, edition, quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, p 84.

stance rigidly maintained by the BBC over its reason for not transmitting *The War Game*, considered 'too horrifying for the medium of television'. But as commentators at that time noted, and as Michael Tracey's investigation has shown¹³, it wasn't really the possible disturbance to viewers that was (nor is) the stumbling block to transmission of Peter Watkins's film, but rather disturbance to the government. In fact, the controversy in 1965-6 over the banning of *The War Game* set up parameters of the debate which were reproduced very closely in the furore over *The Day After*.

The first issue is whether making a film on the subject of the effects of nuclear war is tantamount to advocating nuclear disarmament.

No wonder the Establishment wants to stop the film being widely shown. If several million people saw it, the campaign for the banning of nuclear weapons would receive an enormous impetus.

The Daily Worker, February 9, 1966

This monstrous misrepresentation so accurately mirrors the claims of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament that it is a mystery how the BBC was induced to use up £10,000 to make the film, which could more accurately be called 'The C.N.D. Game'.

The Daily Express, February 9, 1966¹⁴

The logic persists today: any scenario based on the explosion of nuclear weapons in NATO territory is an implicit condemnation of policies of deterrence, and the dramatisation of its consequences a repudiation of government propaganda for civil defence.

The second issue was about taste: was such a subject fit for the mass television audience? The *Daily Telegraph* argued that 'any skillful depiction of a full-scale public bombardment of Britain should be confined to cinemas with restricted admission and not let loose on the ubiquitous television screen'.¹⁵ A writer in *Film Comment* maintained:

*There is some point in releasing it to the cinema. But its potential audience would be tiny, as it shunted from art cinema to art cinema. But should we allow images of the flash, the blast, the firestorm and the demoralised, diseased aftermath to penetrate our sitting-rooms? Why not? Our homes are targets. Nuclear disaster is a family matter.*¹⁶

That nuclear disaster is a family matter is an ideology underlying every representation of nuclear disaster I know of. While the *documentary* address is to the citizen-couple (*Q.E.D.* used two young couples to test types of fallout shelter at different distances from the blast's epicentre), and its representation of the demolition of that community (West London in *Q.E.D.*; Kent in *The War Game*), the *dramas* represent the impact on one or more families, middle-class and slightly fractured on the generational divide. These representative families may in turn be 'placed' within a village or township in some geographical heartland, and much of the drama may concern the replacement of familial ties by other bonds in the face of colossal casualties. But what both documentary

and dramatic forms must negotiate is the problem of *identification*. How can you make an audience identify with the *victims* of the ultimate disaster? As the *Film Comment* writer said of *The War Game*:

*It hurts. It translates the terrors of Dresden and Nagasaki into an England we know. Strange, but when we see a foreign adult actually suffering on the screen, it is possible to avoid identification with him. Show an English child acting pain and everyone sees his own child's face.*¹⁷

(The question is whether such empathy extended, eighteen years later, to Kansas children acting pain in full colour.) If the assumption is that audiences have become inured to images of war casualties and of victims of natural catastrophes, does a film-maker documenting a projection of the effects of nuclear aggression have the right – or in fact the duty – to shock viewers, that is, to address an audience at a level ‘beneath’ their rational judgement? Even the documentary *Q.E.D.*, for example, while making it clear that personal fall-out shelters cost many thousands of pounds, asked us to identify with an interviewed couple’s privations on a two-week simulation, rather than to dwell on how many people would have access to such a facility. But do *Q.E.D.*’s time-lapse sequences of *anonymous* faces subject to the effects of radiation sickness have less impact than the distressing sight of dear old Jason Robards progressively succumbing to it? (For Ms Banks-Smith, evidently not, since she felt that Robards’ make-up made him look like Alistair Sim, and that the film was ‘about a bunch of characters confusable from the start and completely unidentifiable when their hair fell out’.¹⁸)

Without some form of identification with victims rather than survivors – ‘This could happen to me/my family/my neighbourhood/my town’ – the attempt to make realistic images of the nuclear holocaust can assume either the abstract quality of a science feature (with the citizen-couple coping in the new environment) or a disaster movie (‘some of us will survive *this* towering inferno’). *Time* magazine, while generally deploring the artifice of *The Day After*, conceded that ‘much of the power came from the quasi-documentary idea that nuclear destruction had been visited upon the real town of Lawrence, Kansas, rather than upon some backlot of Warner Brothers.’¹⁹ But although a couple of critics accused ABC of attempting the coup of verisimilitude of Orson Welles’s radio *War of the Worlds*, production values left no doubt that we were watching TV fiction, American-style, and the figures offered for identification were contract actors in a location-shot melodrama.

Interestingly, the BBC has chosen to nuke Sheffield in its forthcoming *Threads*, in which Barry Hines’ script concerns the fate of two families linked by the unwed pregnancy of a 20-year-old daughter, ‘a mini-drama overtaken by a maxi-drama’ as producer Michael Jackson put it²⁰, suggesting a convergence of form between British and American television on drama-doc representation of Big Issues. Jackson, who disliked the ‘Dallas-like’ gloss of *The Day After*, says that his 90-minute film will concentrate on ‘the emotional and psychological effects’ of the Bomb on

¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁸ Nancy Banks-Smith, the *Guardian*, December 12, 1983.

¹⁹ Otto Friedrich, ‘Reality is Always Worse’, *Time*, December 5, 1983.

²⁰ Michael Jackson, in conversation with the author in April 1984.

²¹ Sue Summers, the *Standard*, December 9, 1983.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Troy Kennedy Martin, *Vision*, April 1979.

eight or nine characters, rather than on creating an impression of the Blast through special effects (which sustained his *Q.E.D.* documentary, which occupy a mere four minutes of *The Day After*, and which are totally eschewed by the melodramatic *Testament*). The problem of conveying information in the dramatic form, which he sees as a choice between nonsensical dialogue ('What's the EMP factor, Daddy?') and improbable characters who happen to be radiation experts (like the scientist played by John Lithgow in *The Day After*), he and Hines have tried to solve by overlaying a documentary voice. The fact that Jackson is trained as a scientist (and that the BBC's special features unit emerged from Science Department) is part of the advance publicity for *Threads*:

*Jackson's cool scientific approach makes it less likely that the film will meet the same fate in the BBC as 'The War Game' which, Peter Watkins admits, is subjective propaganda against the bomb.*²¹

Jackson is quoted as saying that any film about the nuclear holocaust will make depressing viewing: 'But there's a kind of distress that's helpful and a kind of distress that isn't. If you just turn people's stomachs over to the point where they can't watch then you don't have an audience.'²²

This unease with identification stems from its undermining of the detachment thought appropriate to current affairs issues. Writing in 1979, Troy Kennedy Martin (who would himself adapt Angus Wilson's fable about nuclear war, *The Old Men at the Zoo*, for the BBC in 1983) saw *The War Game* furore as symptomatic of the BBC's naiveté in the 1960's about 'taste':

At that time, there was an underlying feeling that one could make a film about anything, even a holocaust, and do it tastefully. It was believed that there was some Corporation style of making a film about a subject that was abhorrent (like police corruption) without actually shocking anyone.

*No-one asked himself – nor do we ask ourselves now – whether it is morally proper to make a programme about such a subject in such a way that it does not shock. In fact, is not a programme which does not shock us, a failure? It has de-sensitised us to what we should be sensitive. It is neutral when we should be indignant; it is cold-blooded and balanced when we should be emotional and partisan. *The War Game* seems a classic example of this bind.*²³

Kennedy Martin attributes the fact that production of *The War Game* wasn't halted at sight of the script, to the concept that there is an inherent disjunction between the impact of words on a page and images on a screen.

I will argue that the visual rhetoric of *The Day After* is also quite sophisticated. A few of its more charitable critics argued that the film had at least provided us with a repertoire of images to think about the holocaust, and my contention is that the large number of characters in the film provide a diffuse but anchoring point of view for those images.

For example, one of the witnesses to the launch of the Minuteman mis-

siles is the young Hendry boy drawing water from a pump on the family farm next doot to another missile site. We look up with him, admire the beauty of the sight, and then recall from a previous barber-shop exchange that the 'use 'em or lose 'em' tactic means that a Soviet missile is on its way to kill *him*. In addition, identification at the level of relations within the two families are used to pose the question of affiliations people might make when the family is destroyed: what the 'post-nuclear' family would be *if* anyone survived.



The barber-shop conversation which warns of the 'use 'em or lose 'em' tactic.

III

*How do I presume to know what life would be like after such an event? **The Day After** is, after all, a work of fiction, a monstrous unflinching what-if. But the story is grounded on certain facts-of-life. We live in a land where, for example, ICBM's are quietly canistered in cornfields up your neighbour's farmstead. We know from an extensive government literature what these weapons can do and the strategic scenarios designed to use them.*

Edward Hume, screenwriter of *The Day After*²⁴

The scriptwriter whom Brandon Stoddard commissioned had experience in documentary drama—he'd written *21 Hours in Munich*, the television film about the murder of the Israeli athletes. Edward Hume subscribed to ABC's view that an elaborate World War III scenario would alienate viewers; the primary purpose of a film about the nuclear bomb must be to show how it would affect ordinary people:

***The Day After** is not about politics or politicians or military decision-makers. It is simply about you and me—doctors, farmers, teachers, students,*

²⁴ Edward Hume, ABC Public Relations sheet.

²⁵ Edward Hume, quoted in Yorkshire TV press release.

²⁶ Trevor Fishlock, 'Horror Film That Struck at the Heart', the *Times*, November 23, 1983.

brothers and kid sisters engaged in the usual love and labour of life in the month of September.'

Edward Hume²⁵

The unfolding superpower confrontation in Europe is carried in newspaper headlines, radio and TV newscasts which hail the characters (though again, important events of the sequence were cut for the UK version). Discussion of these developments occupies a large part of the first half of the script; by contrast, in *Testament*, which is about the impact of a nuclear strike on one family in an affluent town in Northern California, there is no political build-up to the news flash which interrupts *Sesame Street*. The film, made for independent distribution, operates wholly at the level of before/after melodrama.

As was subsequently much-publicised, filming of *The Day After* was to take place in the summer of 1982 in the town of Lawrence, Kansas, with its citizens acting as extras (shopkeepers smashed their store-fronts for the looting scenes). Lawrence was chosen because it is near the geographical centre of the United States and is close to a big city with a number of missile sites in the region, and it also contains the campus of the University of Kansas. Central to the liberal ideology of the film is the notion that the remnants of this campus will function as the locus of what little community survives—like the medieval monastery. In the publicity avalanche the following year, the citizenry of Lawrence became key definers of the meaning of the film.

For example, in a syndicated article in the *Times*²⁶, a retired professor from the University of Kansas was quoted:

We haven't known the horrors of war in our own land since the Civil War. We've been remote. I hope this film brings Americans as close to the reality of things as you who have lived through bombing.

And the mayor of Lawrence, who was to send a telegram to Andropov:

A few are saying that the film was propaganda, playing into the hands of the commies, but that's not the majority feeling. We think Russian parents must have the same feeling for their kids as we do. Most of us feel the film has served a useful purpose. We want to know more about the arms race, to be able to respond to those who are telling us what is good for us. We want answers.

The framing studio presentation by Yorkshire TV picked up the populist dimension in the marketing of the film. To the radio message which ends the film—'Hello, is anybody there?'—Robert Kee in the presenter's chair, gave a reassuring 'Yes, we're still here... with a studio audience similar to the citizens of Lawrence.' Significantly, among the many small cuts made in the version shown here was the long silence held after this ethereal plea, and the final roller caption with this message:

It is hoped that the images of this film will inspire the nations of this earth,

their peoples and leaders, to find the means to avert the fateful day.

81

And the end credits, like the opening captions acknowledging the participation of the citizens of Lawrence, were also chopped off.

'ABC Motion Pictures Presents – A Nicholas Meyer Film' run the opening-titles to the US broadcast version. The 'author' they found for the film was the fourth director approached. Meyer was a novelist (*The Seven Per Cent Solution*) and film-director (*Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*) with anti-nuke convictions (unlike screenwriter Hume, who came to the subject cold). In a long article for *TV Guide*, written in the form of a production diary, he displays an outspoken moral fervour more common among media professionals in the USA than in Britain:

*I cannot live with myself if I don't make this movie. How often do you get the chance to put your work in the service of your beliefs?*²⁷

*In my business, not often. If this film could sober the world and slow the pace with which we seem determined to turn our planet into a nuclear porcupine, then I guess I'm signing up, no matter what lists my name appears on.*²⁷

Meyer claims credit for persuading ABC to cut the script down to make a single screening, to cast unknowns, and to ignore the Standards and Practices Committee (the alias for the network censor) which, ironically, wasn't worried about the *nuclear* details, but wanted to cut the scene about the fiancée's use of a diaphragm for contraception – an index of the different US standards of what infringes good taste.

Meyer was aware of the danger of lapsing into generic formulae:

*I tell ABC my overall idea: the more **The Day After** resembles a film, the less effective it is likely to be. No TV stars. What we don't want, is another Hollywood disaster movie with viewers waiting to see Shelley Winters succumb to radiation poisoning. To my surprise, ABC agrees. Their sole proviso: one star to help sell the film as a feature overseas. Fair enough.*²⁸

In the event, Jason Robards, a veteran of American documentary dramas (including Home Box Office's forthcoming *Sakharov*) agreed to play Dr Oakes, the pivotal character.

The Department of Defense refused to cooperate unless the script made it clear that the Soviets started the war. ('To Hell with them and Hurray for Freedom of the Press', decides producer [Robert] Papazian. 'We'll paint our own damn Air Force helicopters.'²⁹)

Though in the long post-production process almost an hour's worth of cuts were made in the seven-million-dollar film, Meyer maintained they were aesthetic rather than political. A belief in a non-tendentious 'realism' links him to his British colleagues:

*Let the facts speak for themselves without editorializing. We don't deal with generals or politicians or global strategies: we just want to show what things are going to look like when it happens. **The Day After** is a preview of coming detractions. As such, accuracy, not political prejudice, is all-important.*³⁰

²⁷ Nicholas Meyer, 'Bringing the Unwatchable to TV', *TV Guide*, November 19-25, 1983, pp 7-12.

²⁸ *ibid*, p 8.

²⁹ *ibid*, p 11.

³⁰ *ibid*, p 9.

³¹ Stu Samuels, quoted in *Cinéfantastique*, October 1982, p. 10.

³² Quoted in *Time*, October 24, 1983, p. 40.

³³ Quoted in *Time*, October 24, 1983, p. 40.

³⁴ Quoted in *Time*, December 5, 1983, p. 25.

But here again, ABC equivocated between its naturalist credentials and its artistic license.

*This is not a docu-drama, because Thank God, it hasn't happened. It is a film-maker's perspective of what might happen.*³¹

Meyer didn't expect the film to change anyone's mind ('Liberals will damn the film as being too weak; conservatives will hunt for inaccuracies that presumably weaken the fatal prognosis') but he was sure he could put nuclear disarmament on the national agenda.

While many American critics applauded the 'courage' of its makers, others noticed more cynically that after one postponement, transmission was scheduled for November, a 'sweeps' month, when audience ratings determine future advertising rates for the networks. (*The Day After* went out opposite the first installment of *Kennedy*, bought by NBC from Central.)

A multi-million dollar publicity machine geared up. The slogan was 'The Day After - Beyond Imagining' and then, incongruously: 'The starkly realistic drama of nuclear confrontation and its devastating effect on a group of average American citizens will air November 20th'. Sponsorship was a headache; the industry's joke was that the only companies interested were makers of canned foods. A Madison Avenue executive stated:

*It may be one of the most devastating pieces of film I've ever seen, TV or otherwise, but it is artistically unsuitable to most of our clients. It isn't the issue of controversy; it's more a matter of the commercials conflicting grossly with the content of the programme.*³²

There would be no commercials after the bomb dropped (as in this country, where more spots were slotted into the first hour), and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority organised a boycott of sponsors.

By preview time the political ramifications were worrying Stoddard and Meyer:

*'The Day After' does not advocate disarmament, build-down, build-up, freeze. I don't want to alienate viewers. The movie is like a giant public service announcement, like Smokey the Bear.*³³

But leaked copies were being shown at anti-nuclear fund-raising parties, and the claims to a-politicism didn't wash. The White House nervously considered trying to get President Reagan on before the film to reduce its impact; in the event they put up Secretary of State George Schultz for the studio discussion afterwards, and an aide admitted later that 'our gearing-up contributed to the hype around the movie.'³⁴ Editorials in the right-wing press demanded equal time. A leader in the *New York Post* ran: 'Why is ABC doing Yuri Andropov's job?' and the conservative journal *National Review* accused ABC of 'making a 7-million-dollar con-

tribution to the faltering campaign against the development of Pershing II missiles in Europe'.³⁵ The *New York Times* columnist John Corry thought the film had 'become an event, a rally, and a controversy, much of it orchestrated'.³⁶

The Day After was transmitted at 8 pm (EST) on Sunday November 20, with the following advisory: 'Although based on scientific fact, this film is fiction. Because the graphic depiction of the effects of a nuclear war may not be suitable for younger viewers, parental discretion is advised.'

IV

Halloween III was a lot more scary than World War III.

—A young viewer of *The Day After*³⁷

A hundred-million Americans were summoned to be empathetically incinerated, and left on the true day after without a single idea to chew upon.

New York Times editorial³⁸

Are we supposed to make policy by scaring ourselves to death?

—Henry Kissinger³⁹

The split in the reaction to the film — between viewers who read it generically as a horror or disaster movie and found it too mild to deliver much of a kick, and critics and politicians who were looking for a piece of public service broadcasting and found it banal — was even more accentuated amongst its British audience. The first group evaluated the film by the conventions of a cinematic genre, and the second by the standards of informational television, and both found it wanting: either insufficiently stomach-wrenching or too emotional to permit thoughtful appreciation of 'policy' options. The hybrid nature of the film, that it draws on a number of genres from documentary to science fiction to melodrama — was the cause of much of the critical backlash. Peter Watkins issued a long statement from the Swedish Film Institute, which argued that the film had done more harm than good, because he found it assimilated to an undifferentiated 'made-for-TV-movie' category:

*The film is using traditional theatrical TV film form and thus poses the question as to how we are supposed to differentiate between this film (and its subject) and all the countless other films using the same structural and psychological methods of presentation — such as 'Dallas', 'Winds of War', and 'Kojak'. Can we honestly be certain, deeply certain, that there is not a confusion of emotional demand and response here?*⁴⁰

A similar irritation at the inscription of a crucial political subject in a popular form was expressed by British commentators like Bernard Levin:

Even on the most indulgent view of it in cinematic terms, it is the veriest

³⁵ Both quotes cited in *Newsweek*, October 24, 1983, p 126.

³⁶ Quoted by Alexander Cockburn, *Michigan Voice* (on syndication), December 1983, p 17.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Quoted in *Time*, December 5, 1983, p 25.

³⁹ Quoted by Cockburn, *op cit.*

⁴⁰ Peter Watkins quoted in the *Standard*, December 9, 1983, p 21.

⁴¹ Bernard Levin, the *Times*, December 10, 1983.

⁴² Mary Whitehouse quoted in the *Guardian*, November 23, 1983, p 5.

⁴³ Elizabeth Grigsley, *Guardian Letter* Page, November 30, 1983.

⁴⁴ Reported in the *Guardian*, November 30, 1983.

⁴⁵ The *Times*, January 19, 1984.

trash—composed almost entirely of verbal and visual clichés, the acting is dreadful and its most striking single image—a vast panoramic shot of wounded and dying people waiting hopelessly for succour—is lifted straight from *Gone With the Wind*. All it can do is soften a few more heads, increase the emotional content in an argument already over-supplied with it, and induce nightmares in the more impressionable members of the audience.⁴¹

The argument here is little changed from the days of *The War Game*. ABC had tried to forestall such attacks by previewing the film (much to ITV's annoyance) four times for the press and other interested parties—like civil servants from the Ministry of Defence, Foreign Office, Home Office, Cabinet Office, 10 Downing Street, and the American Embassy. Further showings were cancelled when Mary Whitehouse of the National Viewers and Listeners Association called for it to be banned:

*ABC is going to make £7-million from this film. If that is their motive for showing it when it could have an effect on immature and vulnerable people, then—and I am careful about using the word—it is an offensive thing.*⁴²

To which a *Guardian* letter writer responded: 'If she thinks *The Day After* is too harrowing to watch, what in God's name does she think the reality is?'⁴³ But the film was by then enmeshed in the moral panic over video nasties.

Mutterings in the preview theatre were largely to the effect that *The War Game* had been a much better film, and the official line, articulated by Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine on November 29, was that the Government had no objection to the screening because it would reinforce public support for its defense policy. He told the Commons:

*I hope that the public will realise that the devastation that is portrayed in the film takes place in America as a result of a Soviet nuclear weapon and I hope the public will be fully aware that the film will never be shown in the Soviet Union.*⁴⁴

In fact, the sequence of events in the military scenario makes it clear that NATO fires the first tactical nuclear weapon—as a warning to Warsaw Pact conventional troops. The film was sold to Polish TV for a piffling 6000 dollars and was transmitted in January 1984, watched by nearly two-thirds the entire population. ABC insisted on monitoring the translated transcripts, and observers noted the blurring of a key word in the announcement of a revolt amongst East German troops.⁴⁵ (But then the ITV version is missing a reference to the deployment of Pershing II missiles in Europe....)

Even left-wing journalists like the *New Statesman*'s Duncan Campbell disliked the film's aesthetics, though he recognised that it was using a popular form:

By European standards, The Day After is extremely tame in its depiction of the effects of nuclear attack on the survivors, and often loses its pace and

tautness in order to incorporate lengthy dialogue between the principal characters. It may be that this heavy dose of traditional soap-opera form, familiar to the audiences of *Dallas* or *Coronation Street*, actually carried the message about the horror of nuclear weapons more effectively to the mass audience.⁴⁶

Campbell was among a minority of critics (the *Observer*'s Julian Barnes being another) who thought that the routine production values heightened the film's effect, so that its lack of realism to European eyes became a virtue. There is an implicit assumption, I think, that Americans are naive about the carnage of war and therefore ought not to have the temerity to deal with the subject in popular fiction as opposed to journalism or documentary. The industry magazine *Television Today* argued that it was 'the theme that we should have tackled ourselves':

*We know... that if American Television journalists can be doggedly blunt and courageous, American Television fiction can wobble very easily into clichés. That said, it is the United States that produced the serial Holocaust, which made such an impact in Europe, and now it has made The Day After. Whatever shortcomings British Television noticed about The Day After – and they were obvious – we should ask ourselves what the creative climate of our drama has been in 1983 that the British have not been first to make such a programme.*⁴⁷

Perhaps the international economic climate for prestige television means that the impetus for progressive drama must be sought where the dollars are. It will be an interesting index of shifts in national broadcasting culture to compare the BBC's *Threads* (budgeted at £275,000) when it is transmitted in the autumn.

V

The Day After is an incoherent film referencing, as I will argue, so many different cinema and television genres, that it is debatable whether the bricolage is a conscious attempt to address a notional 'universal' audience, or the unintended messy result of the contradictory strains on its production which I have already suggested. Parts of this mosaic have been effaced by the re-cutting for ITV – and the Hollywood distributor's synopsis makes it clear that some sequences are missing even from the longer video release version – but a careful viewing suggests an unsatisfactory interweaving of a number of generic discourses:

Drama-documentary

The American hybrid form, in contrast to the British, privileges the dramatic fiction over the factual documentation. I have already pointed out that the peculiarity of making an 'accurate' film of a cataclysm which has not taken place shifts the film out of the drama-documentary proper.

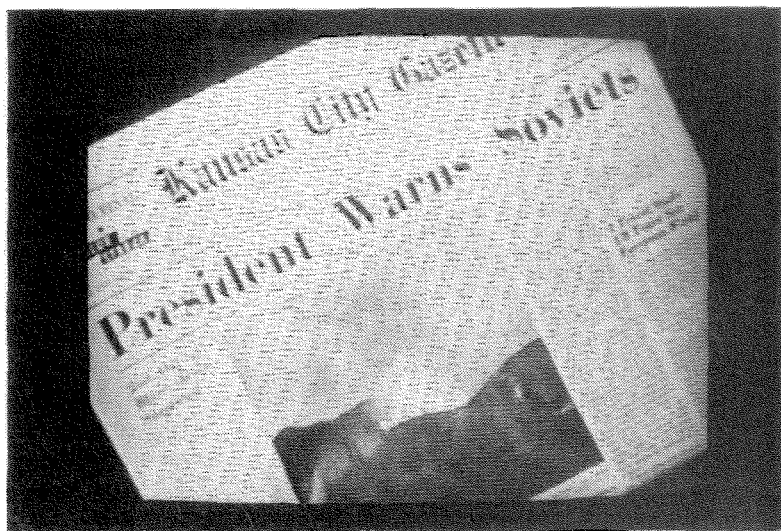
⁴⁶ Duncan Campbell, *New Statesman*, December 2, 1983.

⁴⁷ *Television Today* editorial, December 15, 1983.

Much of the 'expert' discussion of the film turned on its merits as what we might call 'science fiction': how truthfully did it show the consequences of nuclear warfare? On that score it was reckoned to be a 'best case' scenario; actual casualties and physical destruction from that kind of attack would be much worse, as in fact the final caption declares:

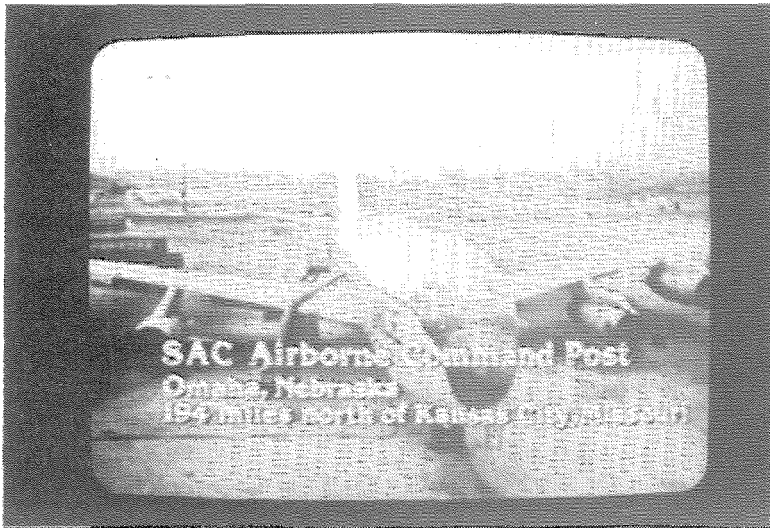
The catastrophic events you have witnessed are, in all likelihood, less severe than the destruction that would actually occur in the event of a full nuclear strike against the United States.

But the first half of the film foregrounds a different factual discourse: East/West power politics. The unfolding NATO vs Warsaw Pact confrontation is conveyed in a stream of bulletins which are heeded (or occasionally not) by characters both major and minor, who discuss them in venues from student unions to barber-shops. 'The build-up to inter-continental nuclear conflict in *The Day After* follows fairly faithfully the ideas of western military planners about how World War III would begin if deterrence failed.'⁴⁸



Newspapers and news bulletins signal impending East/West confrontation.

Other signifiers of the film's documentary credentials range from captions placing locations on a geographical radius from Kansas City ('The Dahlberg Farm - 40 miles south-east') to verité sequences of military personnel who are obviously non-actors. The precredit sequence, 'SAC Airborne Command Post - Omaha, 194 miles north of Kansas City', showing the commanding general coming on board for a routine flight, is shot with a handheld camera, and the plane's overflight provides a point of view for the wide angle aerial shots of the Midwest countryside over which the titles appear. (This early verité sequence, astonishingly, has been shifted to much later in the ITV version, where it makes scarcely any sense at all.)



Verité shot of a US military installation.

The first scene after the titles (entirely missing from the ITV version) is a track around the Kansas City Board of Trade where the stock market hubbub is drowned out by a TV report about economic sanctions and a consequent Soviet military build-up. The Russian ambassador says in an interview: 'You call *us* provocative? When *you* have 7000 nuclear weapons posed on our border?' We meet none of the main characters in the Board of Trade, nor will the film return there; such sequences serve to establish a documentary plenitude to the portrait of Kansas life before the Bomb. Also, since none of the stockbrokers seem to be paying much attention to these political developments, whereas most of our characters *will*, there is an implicit opposition between the oblivious, unconcerned capitalists and citizens like *us*.

The most powerful incursion of the political sphere into the world of the fiction is the President's radio broadcast (with a voice not unlike Reagan's) a few days after the holocaust. It begins voice-over shots of casualties with fallout snow showering down on them and is listened to by survivors on the university campus:

*I share your grief. . . . America has survived. There has been no surrender. We remain undaunted. We are counting on **your** patience and **your** strength to rebuild.*

This rhetoric, recalling the infamous British poster from the early days of World War II, is met by cynicism ('Do you believe everything they tell you?') and a quotation from Einstein to the effect that however World War III is fought, the fourth World War will be fought with sticks and stones. A populist suspicion of government has been a hallmark of some US drama-documentary subjects, like *Washington Behind Closed Doors* and *King*.



Western iconography: Jim Dahlberg confronts trekkers after the blast.

American pastoral

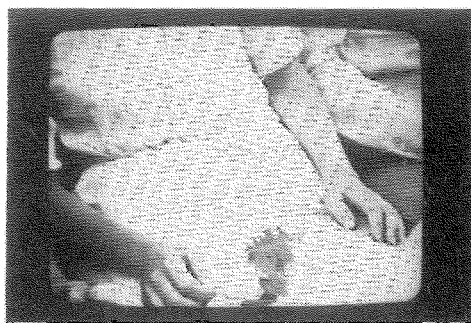
The Day After's idealised portrait of mid-American life irritated many of the British critics particularly. Its iconography is largely rural: bucolic farms and country churches, cattle pens and wheatfields, washing lines and hand-pumps. The pastoral is accentuated by a score derived from the American composer Virgil Thompson, and two of the three families, the Hendrys and the Dahlbergs, live on farms. (Dr Oakes lives in Kansas City, but teaches at the university hospital in Lawrence, 40 miles away.) We are cued quickly to the fact that it is *Kansas City* which will be nuked, but the devastation of the *countryside* and its people dominates the imagery: fields turned to ash, animals become petrified carcasses. It seems as if the bleak imagery of Dustbowl America is the nearest the film-makers can find to the wholesale depredation of the American landscape, and the faces of the farmers as they listen to an agronomist lecturing on impossible decontamination procedures echo the Walker Evans portraits from the same region of America in the 1930s.

The pastoral slides into *western* iconography in later parts of the film. Since motors no longer function, Denise Dahlberg is carried to Lawrence in a horse-drawn cart; her father carries a rifle to protect the homestead, and is shot by trekkers at night in front of an animal roasting on a spit.

The BBC's *Z for Zachariah* used a British pastoral setting: it posited the post-holocaust survival of a remote Welsh valley. A teenage girl is alone in this sanctuary until the arrival of a scientist suffering from radiation sickness, who hunts her down when he recovers. Here the production values of a two-hour two-hander encourage identification with unravished landscape *instead* of characters.

While the three families (the Oakes, the Dahlbergs and the Hendrys) are all-American kin to the Waltons, and the subsidiary characters just substantial enough to establish wide-ranging identification, there are a couple of unusual discourses in the melodramatic sub-plots.

The first is the conflict between fathers and daughters. In an early scene, Dr Oakes's twenty-year old daughter Marilyn meets him for lunch in downtown Kansas City to tell him she's moving to Boston to be more independent and to study at a museum school ('We're all changing, Daddy, don't you see?'). Oakes asks her if the real reason isn't that her boyfriend is going to medical school there, but accepts her leaving home: 'It is not so easy, you know – saying goodbye.' (Marilyn ended up on the UK cutting room floor; in the US version she takes refuge in a Kansas City fallout shelter and is incinerated when the second bomb hits.) Jim Dahlberg's daughter Denise is getting married to Bruce, but the couple are late for the wedding rehearsal because they were joyriding on a motorcycle, and Father is very displeased. Later the couple decide to make love ('Can't you wait two more days?' 'No!') and Denise goes into the house to fetch what we infer to be her diaphragm, which her sister has stolen, precipitating the quarrel between the girls which so alarmed the US Standards and Practices Committee. The film intercuts this squabble over a contraceptive device upstairs with Jim's face downstairs as he watches a TV news report on the blockade of Berlin. Denise leaves with Bruce, and is caught by her father when she sneaks back into the house next morning: 'Frankly, Daddy, it's none of your business.' Dahlberg's acknowledgement of his daughter's sexuality ('You're no sneak') is keyed as a high melodramatic moment in the early part of the film and will be recalled throughout the Dahlberg sequences. When an hysterical Denise runs out of the cellar she sits with her wedding dress on the same stairs, and later hallucinates that Stephen Klein, the Jewish student whom the family have admitted to the cellar, is in fact Bruce – and she makes love to him. Dahlberg turns a flashlight on the couple. When the group leave the cellar they attend a religious service in the gutted church, the pastor breaks down in tears, and Denise starts haemorrhaging from the vagina(!). Stephen Klein offers to take her and her blinded brother to the university hospital and Jim gives up his children to Klein.



Left, the father-daughter confrontation over sex. Right, the daughter's post-blast bleeding.

It's difficult to know what to make of these episodes in which paternal power is challenged by young female sexuality. They sit uneasily between the repressive morality of melodrama and the lubricious subplots of disaster movies, in which permissiveness is likely to mark the character as a likely victim of the impending catastrophe.

What seems to be implied is that moral standards are changing and will have to be overthrown in the new social relations after the holocaust. Pragmatically the survival of the race will demand a fellowship that overrides divisions of class, age and race—an egalitarianism of disfigured casualties. When Klein finds Denise among the hundreds of wounded lying in the university gymnasium they are both bald and covered in sores. The printed synopsis implies an ending which reconstitutes the couple: Klein leads Denise and her brother back to the deserted Dahlberg farm. The screened version, however, ends with the dying Oakes' return to a flattened Kansas City. He searches the ruins for his house and finds four refugees camped around a small fire in the débris. 'Get out of my house!' he cries. One of the refugees offers him a token—an onion—which he accepts, breaking down weeping and putting his head on the stranger's shoulder, as the camera pulls back to a high angle long shot of this embrace in the ruins. After the slaughter of one's kin and the collapse of property and other social relations, bonds may be formed with unaccommodated humanity, the 'poor, bare, forked animal'. In accordance with liberal ideology, the pattern for this fellowship has been set earlier by ethnically out-of-place characters. The black airman William McCoy has been the trekking guardian of a psychotic tramp; Dr Sam Hachiya (the reference to a previous nuclear catastrophe is pointed) is the mainstay of the beleaguered hospital.

The re-working of melodramatic themes in the interests of humanist ideology is also inflected by the constant interweaving of the personal



Domestic exposition: Dr Oakes and his wife discuss the crisis.

and the political. Dr Oakes and his wife, alarmed by the news reports, retire to bed and reminisce about the 1962 Cuban missile crisis: they had stayed up to watch Kennedy on TV, and 'made Marilyn that night'. War didn't happen in 1962 'and it's not going to happen now!' The Oakes' neighbours are leaving on vacation despite the alert, and they're 'taking their Vietnamese maid with them'. This remark, gratuitously informative in the context of that most clichéd of domestic situations – a middle-aged couple talking things over before going to sleep – is typical of the script's often clumsy attempts to inscribe an awareness of contemporary political history into the quotidian.

Other observers have noted that the pregnant woman is becoming a stereotype of the nuclear dramas. *The Day After* gives Allison the most forthrightly political speech in the script:

We knew about bombs for forty years, but nobody was interested. . . . There'll be no kiss-and-make-up. . . . Are they going to sweep up the dead and build supermarkets?! [Don't] tell me about hope. . . .

The printed synopsis suggests that the film was meant to end with the birth of her baby ('the first child born into this new world'), but this metaphor for survival is absent from both versions of the film I've seen.

The Day After's admixture of politics and melodrama is particularly noticeable in comparison to *Testament*, directed by Lynne Littman, which concerns itself with the life of Carol Weatherby and her family in Hamlin, California on the day before and several days after an unanticipated and unseen nuclear attack. There is no political context whatsoever; the family and the community literally waste away from radiation sickness, and apart from one nasty teenaged girl, there is no breakdown of the Caring Community. Carol's husband never returns from his office



A metaphor for survival? The pregnant Allison is attended by Dr Oakes.

⁴⁹ Lynne Littman, quoted by Nigel Wigmore in the *Guardian*, March 5, 1983.

in San Francisco, and she copes alone, sewing up the bodies of her children in burial sheets, until she breaks down, crying 'Who did this to us?' and falls into the arms of the priest. The film was financed by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and contains nothing that would be unassimilable to 'weepie' melodrama – even the parable in the primary school's production of 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin'. In the United States, *Testament* was 'run over' by *The Day After*, as Littman put it⁴⁹, and Paramount is now distributing the film in Europe.

On the other hand, a German film about a localised nuclear disaster caused by a road accident, *Due to an Act of God* (1983), while basically a two-family drama, attempted to embed melodrama in a political scenario: the contaminated town is sealed off by the federal authorities and the villagers left to die. (As in *Testament*, the local church is the principle venue for group scenes.) The main couple learn that their struggle is against the repressive State, and the fact that the film is supposed to be set in 1990 didn't stop this political parable from getting axed by a German TV network. The nuclear accident in *Due to an Act of God* is the trigger for a political lesson: the enemy is inside our borders, in Civil Defence headquarters.

The Day After doesn't make much of the emergency régime – we see firing squads in the background – but the script is peppered with cynicism about NATO, politicians, and bureaucrats. The university emerges as a self-governing unit in the weeks following the attack. It is possible that this quaint liberalism might have been given a more specifically patriotic inflection were it not for the fact that the film was intended for an international audience.



Horror: an anonymous victim is vapourised.

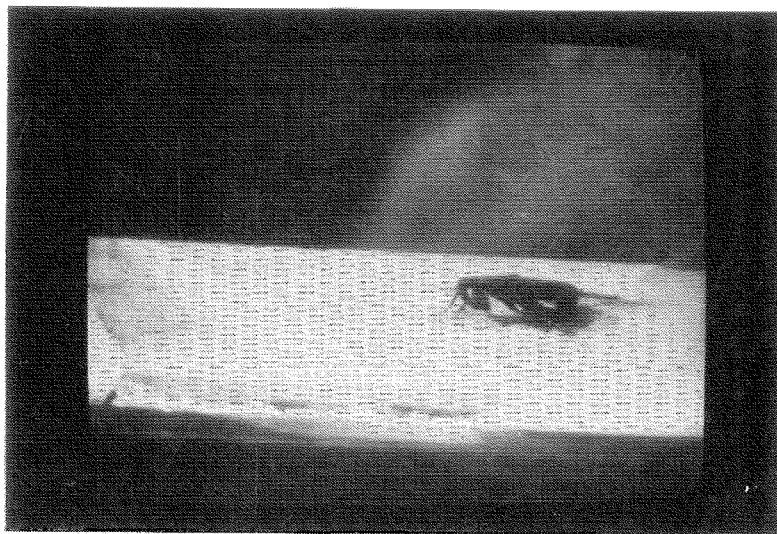
As Julian Petley points out⁵⁰, these are the genres to which most cinematic treatments of nuclear holocaust have belonged. Cold War films were 'nuclear nightmares and hellfire images of horrible mutations, rampaging resurrections of the Primeval Beast'⁵¹. But in its reluctance to ascribe blame to the Soviets alone, *The Day After* seems rather more an ideological product of détente. Nevertheless, it carries some telling echoes of that older cycle of films, such as panic in the streets, looting in supermarkets, and the vicious scrabbles for water and rations under the emergency measures after the disaster. Against this general tableau of moral decay the film limns small acts of charity.

Some of the images most obviously belonging to the horror genre have been excised along the way to the screen: Dr Oakes wrapping his coat over a person on fire, or removing glass fragments from a woman's face. Care seems to have been taken, in such special effects sequences as bodies being vapourised, that we not identify victims precisely as named characters. Other horror motifs were diluted in the ITV version. Dr Oakes and Nurse Bauer at one point speculate on the survival powers of the cockroach; later there is a close-up of cockroach/cut to a blinded woman sitting up and screaming – these two shots have been excised.

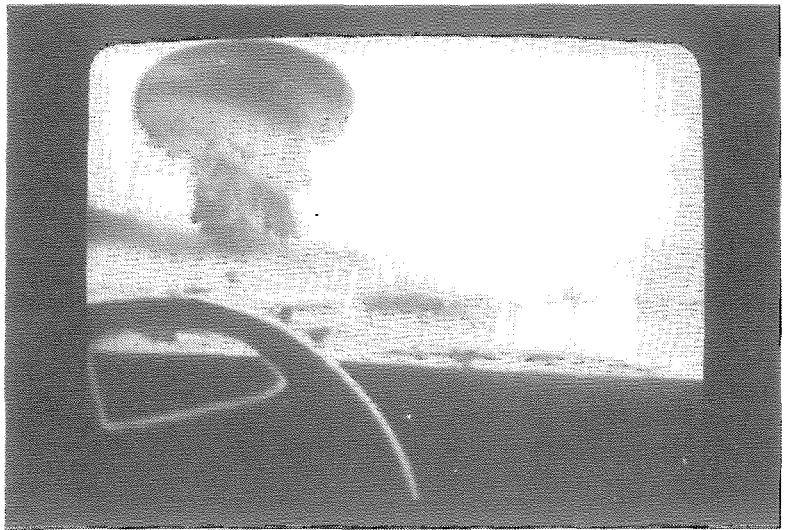
The science fiction imagery is relatively muted for a film by a *Star Trek* director. The four minutes of the strike on Kansas is composed mostly of actuality footage of firestorms and atomic blasts, except for the orange vista of mushroom clouds seen from the point of view of Oakes in his station-wagon stuck on the highway back to Kansas City. After a fade to black, we see the eerie effect of radiation ash falling like snow on blackened rubble. It isn't until the end, and Oakes's eventual arrival in the city, that we get a veritable lunar landscape of the petrified ruins. Robards is matted in front of a stylised monumental relic: the crumbled war

⁵⁰ Julian Petley, *op cit.*

⁵¹ Joe Kane, *Take One*, vol 2, no 6, 1970, quoted in Julian Petley, *ibid.*



Horror: the cockroach as monstrous survivor.



Science fiction: a mushroom cloud viewed from Dr Oakes' car.

memorial down which the camera panned in the first half. From this vantage we look down on a model shot of the smoking, desolate plain after the Holocaust.

Disaster movies

"I just want to go upstairs and get into bed – with you," quotes Dennis Hackett at the beginning of his *Times* review: 'We were on the way down to the well-worn trail of sex-tinged sub-plots that lead to a disaster movie.'⁵² This was the genre to which many British critics and commentators assigned *The Day After*: 'a second-rate disaster movie script', opined defence correspondent Jon Connell in the *Sunday Times*⁵³. Apart from the film's foregrounding of sexual relations, there is another staple of the disaster genre: the group of people stuck in a confined space, in this case the campus hospital. Most of them are secondary characters, though, and while three of the principals do end up in adjacent beds (yet again, not in the ITV version), there is little spectacle (apart from operations by flashlight) and rather mundane problem-solving, mostly to do with how to dispose of bodies. There is no prospect of rescue.

Time magazine found the dramatic structure excessively anecdotal for a disaster movie: 'there are no people here, only targets, stick figures on a Midwestern landscape, waiting to be wasted'.⁵⁴ A reader replied: 'It is this attitude, detached and impersonal, that makes it possible for the super-powers to continue to build their nuclear arsenals, without realizing that the "stick figures" involved are our families, our neighbours and ourselves.'⁵⁵ Which suggests that, for *this* disaster movie, at any rate, fully rounded characters were not considered a dramatic necessity by the American viewer.

⁵² Dennis Hackett, 'Soap Opera Armageddon', the *Times*, December 12, 1983.

⁵³ Jon Connell, 'Soap Opera Armageddon', the *Sunday Times*, December 11, 1983.

⁵⁴ *Time*, October 24, 1983.

⁵⁵ Letter to the editor, *Time*, November 14, 1983.

I have already referred to ABC's desire to distinguish *The Day After* aesthetically from previous made-for-TV movies. The film is studded with visual grace-notes that belong to the rhetoric of art cinema: shortly after we learn from the university scientist that the radiation level has fallen below the level at which it is fatal to go outdoors, an unexplained hand reaches up and crashes a rock against a bell in a steeple, an unexplicated symbol. A very few British commentators dissented from the 'banal' verdict:

*Despite all the previous warnings that the film was no more than thermonuclear soap opera, it seemed to me that it was a commendably restrained, careful and indeed, noble attempt to find memorable metaphors for the unthinkable.*⁵⁶

The representation of destruction, for example, is sometimes as metonymic as Humphrey Jennings' wartime documentaries: the montage that precedes the launch of the first Minuteman missiles includes bucolic shots of cows, a grazing white horse, an empty swing, and a wheat-field (the UK version inserted a shot of sunflowers, in case we didn't get the message); and then intercuts the silo at the moment of launching with the figure of Mrs Hendry in the farmhouse next door, of her dressing table shaking as the missile rumbles up from the ground, a very big close-up of her terrified eyes (cut from the UK version), her face looking out of the window, her children in the yard, the white horse bolting in slow motion, the white missile in flight. A sequence of shots of our characters and the people of Lawrence looking up to see the missiles arc across the blue sky—rising over the rim of the football stadium, for example—take on an almost surreal quality, and the contradiction between the beauty of the images and the knowledge of the destruction they represent was often noted by the film's critics.

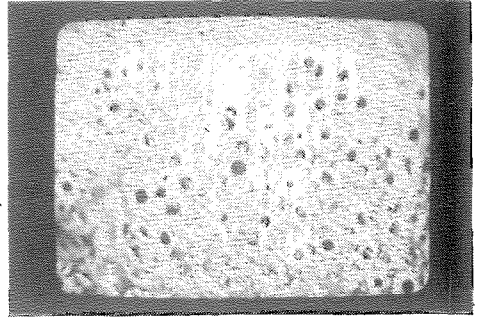
A very early scene establishes the film's claim to a reading different from the consumption of made-for-TV movies: Dr Oakes' daughter Marilyn takes him to the Kansas City art museum, and shows him a Chinese landscape, commenting that unlike Western painters such as Corot and Turner, 'sometimes it's hard to know how to experience a Chinese landscape because the artist doesn't tell you where you're watching from. You know why? Because he wants you to be in the landscape, a part of it, not out there looking at it.' 'You mean like a God's eye point-of-view?' asks Oakes with a chuckle. 'Something like that,' she says. This odd piece of self-reflexiveness is obviously intended as instruction on how to look at the film, and the injunction against detachment signals that we are to be inscribed (in bold letters) into the world of the fiction. As I've argued already, the film disperses our dramatic interest among a large number of slight characters (most of whose paths never cross); crane shots like the gymnasium scene and the final shot of Oakes and the squatters down in the ruins suggest a divine omniscience. The attempt to preclude identification with survivors in an unbearable world has in this case induced a

⁵⁶ David Edgar, the *Guardian*, December 12, 1983, p 17.

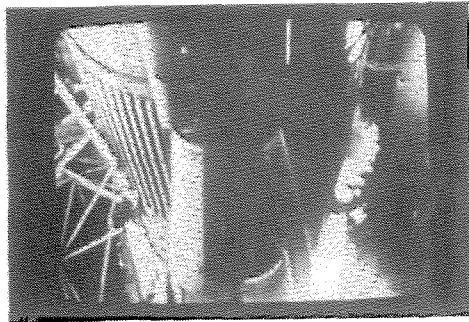
1



2



3



4



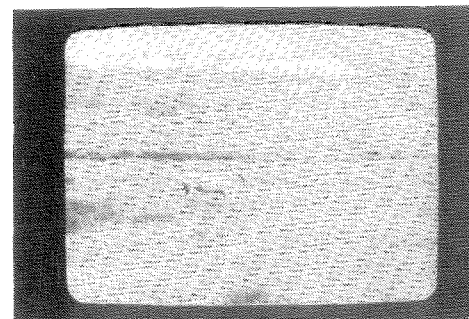
5



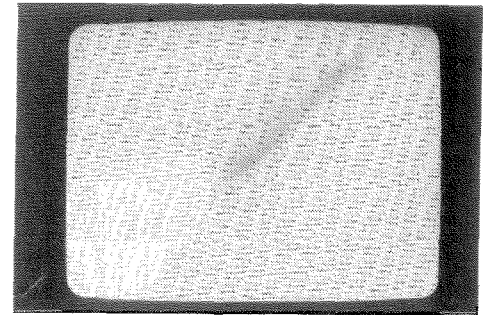
6



7



8



Metonymic montage: shots from the sequence which precedes the US missile launch.

deistic perspective, which psychologists of the phenomenon of nuclear vertigo may find even more insidious than the 'judgement day' scenario of conventional disaster movies. The mode in which art *cinema* has handled this vertigo is black comedy (*Dr. Strangelove*): 'We'll all fry together when we fry,' as Tom Lehrer put it.

Conclusion

Julian Barnes's review of *The Day After* in the *Observer* referred to the *Holocaust* factor, in which the 'subject' of a work arguably overwhelms its 'style':

*If the horror of genocide can transcend banal scenes in which actors stand around looking like advertisements for striped pyjamas, then the events recorded must indeed be of shocking significance.*⁵⁷

Thus, if the theme of six million destroyed is surpassed by the destruction of the entire world, then in the argument advanced by Colin McCabe (among others) in the *Guardian* round-up: 'The subject matter is so ghastly that it defeats every banality.'⁵⁸ And *The Day After* was far from banal: within the constraints of a big budget production for a major commercial TV network, producer Stoddard, writer Hume and director Meyer made a film which merits its Event status. *The Day After* self-consciously draws upon a repertoire of TV and film conventions diffused by American cultural hegemony, in order to reach a huge transnational and transmedia audience.

The irony that this warning about the Bomb should come from the country who invented it in the first place, and whose present government seems most irresponsible about its threat – this irony is lost on no one. In the American political context, it does seem to have acted as a catalyst for a population woefully ignorant about the subject compared to Europeans. Its ideological centre is liberalism, sixties-style, with all the attendant virtues and vices. Indifference to the film in this country – and I would be interested to know whether it was shared elsewhere in any of the 40 countries where the film has been distributed – seems to be based on a complex of convictions: the critical belief in a dichotomy between serious fiction and entertainment; a perception of American political and historical naïveté; resistance to American melodrama and its acting styles; and, finally, resentment that we didn't do it first – though ours would have been in the best possible taste.

⁵⁷ Julian Barnes, the *Observer*, December 11, 1983.

⁵⁸ Colin McCabe, the *Guardian*, December 12, 1983, p 17.

ENTERING 'THE TWILIGHT ZONE'

WILLIAM BODDY EXAMINES THE
TRANSITION TO 'HOLLYWOOD
TELEVISION'

OFFERED HERE is less an auteurist or textual analysis of the work of television writer and producer Rod Serling than a suggestion of the historical, economic and critical contexts necessary for an understanding of such work in television. An appreciation of these contexts is central to several fundamental problems in current television historiography: the attempts to periodise television's past and account for historical change; the integration of formal texts into the medium's economic history; and an understanding of the role of creative personnel and generic conventions in the history of television's programme forms.

The career of Rod Serling provides a privileged point of entry to such issues of historiography, especially through a consideration of his work on the television series the *Twilight Zone*, aired on CBS from 1959 to 1964. Although today in the United States and elsewhere, Serling's name is most commonly associated with the *Twilight Zone*, by the late '50s Serling was already one of the most prolific, decorated and controversial television playwrights of the so-called 'Golden Age' of live television drama of the mid-'50s, the half-decade of writer-centred, mainly sixty-minute, realistic, socially-conscious, sponsored anthology drama which has been persistently positioned as television's Eden before the fall. Serling was known not only as a writer of socially-conscious, didactic television plays, but also as a frequent critic of commercial censorship in the medium. What makes Serling's career more striking is the fact that of the relatively small group of prominent playwrights of television's Golden Age – writers like Gore Vidal, Paddy Chayefsky and Robert Alan Aurthur – Serling was nearly alone in maintaining a presence in the medium through its period of greatest change in the late 1950s, when the live anthology dramatic programmes were replaced by episodic telefilm series from Hollywood.

Serling's unusual move through the era of live anthology drama to the telefilm series which have dominated network prime time since the late '50s provides not only a self-conscious commentary on the shifting status of the writer in television but a suggestion of the changing economic structures and cultural positioning of the medium in American life. The

second half of the 1950s marked the greatest and longest-lasting changes in prime-time programming, changes which can be marked along several axes: prime-time programming shifted from live to film formats, from New York to Hollywood production centres, and from anthology to continuing-character episodic series. The programme shifts of the late '50s in sum represented a repudiation of the aesthetic values elaborated in the critical discourse on television in the first half of the 1950s. Although the early writing on television has several distinct origins and aims, from journalistic reviewing and prescriptive manuals of television production techniques to general cultural criticism, such writing did create a remarkably ambitious and consistent set of aesthetic prescriptions for the medium. To a large extent, these aesthetic frames have remained unexamined in the subsequent literature, and a study of the career of Rod Serling provides an opportunity to consider the critical discourse on television in its historical specificity and agency at the moment of the industry's greatest change.

The *Twilight Zone*, on which Serling served as co-owner, executive producer and chief writer, stands at a particularly significant moment in the history of television's regulation and public reputation. From the mid-'50s many of the medium's most prominent writers and critics had complained of a decline in prime-time programming in comparison to what was already being called television's Golden Age. Their complaints joined other public controversies at the end of the '50s to create the most serious regulatory and public relations threats to the industry in its history. The sustained public scrutiny of industry practices which culminated in the investigations of rigged television quiz programmes in 1959 and 1960 provided a forum for commercial television's various public critics, including Serling and several other prominent writers and producers, but also the occasion for a series of counter-attacks by industry leaders. The quiz show hearings, taking place over the first season of Serling's *Twilight Zone*, provide a portrait not only of network programming practices, but of the industry's new attitudes toward its creative personnel, its critics and its audience. The new business practices, programming philosophies and self-representations of the television industry at the end of the '50s are both strikingly disjunct from those of just a few years earlier and congruent with the patterns which have prevailed over most of the next two decades.

Against this context, Serling's work on the *Twilight Zone*, as well as his public statements in the period, displays an ambivalent response to the changes in the economy of network television and the status of television writers, a negotiation between the dramatic values of television's Golden Age and the economic and programme structures of the thirty-minute film series. This ambivalence gives the *Twilight Zone*, even in its original network exhibition in 1959, a curious tone of nostalgia, a blending of the values of 1950s live drama with the format and production routines of 'modern' telefilm programming.

By the mid-'50s Rod Serling was the most spectacular success story of a generation of what an NBC executive in 1952 labelled the new 'artist-

¹ Edward Barry Roberts, 'Writing for Television', in William I Kaufman (ed), *The Best Television Plays 1950-51*, New York, Hastings House, 1952, p 300.

² William Bluem and Roger Manvell (eds), *TV: The Creative Experience*, New York, Hastings House, 1967, p 17.

³ Rod Serling, 'TV in the Can versus TV in the Flesh', *New York Times Magazine*, November 24, 1957, p 49.

⁴ *ibid*, pp 52, 54.

⁵ *New York Times*, April 22, 1936, II, p 13.

playwrights' of television.¹ The most prominent of them, including Serling, came to the medium from relative obscurity, not from established careers in theatre or the motion pictures. Indeed, the position of the live television drama writer in the 1950s was often juxtaposed in the contemporary literature to that of the writer in Hollywood, and the distinction was part of a larger polemical opposition of the two media and industries. Live television drama was seen as 'the penultimate technological extension of the naturalistic drama', and its subjects, dramatic strategies and acting styles were all distinguished from those of the Hollywood film.² Live television drama, according to the critics of the '50s, favoured small casts and modest sets, relied on the medium shot and close-up and emphasised brief, loosely-plotted narrative structures compared to the motion pictures.

Serling, like many other contemporary observers of television drama, hypostatized the singularities of live and film programming into a more general cultural opposition between what were sometimes called 'Broadway television' and 'Hollywood television'. In 1957 Serling wrote in the *New York Times*:

*Whatever memorable television moments exist were contributed by live shows. Whatever techniques were developed that were television's own are live techniques. Whatever preoccupation there was with quality and with the endless struggle against sponsors' dicta, fears and endless interferences existed in New York and Chicago—not in Los Angeles.*³

Likewise, the position of the writer in live television drama was celebrated in the '50s literature in juxtaposition to that of the writer of Hollywood telefilms. Serling argued:

Hollywood television took a leaf out of the notebook of the motion pictures and shoved its writers into a professional Siberia. The writer of the filmed television play was never and is not now an identifiable name in terms of the audience.

*This is in sharp contrast to the New York live television writer who has been granted an identity, an importance and a respect second only to the legitimate playwright. For this reason, it is rare that a 'live' playwright will work for filmed shows, despite the fact that in the long run, the half-hour film may bring him almost ten times the total price of the live script.*⁴

Another important part of the appeal of television to some writers in the '50s was the attractiveness of television drama as a vehicle for social commentary. Echoing the remarks of writer Gore Vidal, Serling argued in 1956 that 'of all the media, TV lends itself most beautifully to presenting a controversy. You can just take part of a controversy and, using just a small number of people, get your point across.'⁵ This linking of the dramaturgy of theatrical naturalism with an agenda of liberal reformism was also seen as distinct from the genre-based 'escapist' film series from Hollywood.

A final element of the opposition between filmed and live television in the '50s were the related issues of programme length and dramatic form.

While most of the prestige live drama programmes were sixty minutes in length, most telefilm series until the late '50s were thirty minutes long. One television critic in 1957 dismissed the thirty-minute programme with: 'The half-hour show is too brief and it is interrupted by a commercial too soon after it begins to be anything but a hook, a gimmick and a resolution.'⁶ Serling wrote in 1960 that 'the half-hour film has always been an imitative, doggy, telegraphed, insipid, assembly-line product since its inception eleven years ago.'⁷ The comparison of programme lengths was often argued along dramaturgical lines, with the 'drama of character' (versus the drama of plot or spectacle) requiring more than thirty minutes of air time.

Economic changes both inside and outside the network television industry in the second half of the '50s led to a systematic move away from the dramatic values and programme forms championed by the partisans of live drama. The economic shifts reflected not only the growth and realignment of the commercial interests within network television, but also simultaneous changes in the American motion-picture industry and the advertising business. By the end of the '50s the television industry's internal structure and its relations with its significant external partners were established in the stable forms which were to endure through most of the next two decades, the significant programming exceptions being theatrical films in network prime-time and the made-for-TV movie, both introduced in the '60s.

One measure of the programming changes of the late '50s was evident within the anthology drama series themselves; the series increasingly turned to melodrama, to Hollywood stars and to the film format after the mid-'50s. Even more traumatic to television writers and critics was the virtual extinction of all forms of live anthology drama by 1960s. In 1962 Erik Barnouw described the abrupt shift in the market for television writers: 'Throughout the 1950s it seemed to be leading television through bold exploration toward a shining future. Then, within a short time, it seemed to be leading to disaster.'⁸ A typical contemporary construction of the programming shift was television critic Gilbert Seldes's 1956 denunciation of 'the oil slick of Hollywood's increasing influence in the medium.'⁹ The shift in network prime-time programming from the anthology to the continuing-character series was particularly significant to television writers and critics, whose work concentrated on the production and reviewing of the unique, single-work television play, the 'top of the prestige pyramid of television drama', according to Seldes¹⁰. Television critic John Crosby confessed in 1958: 'After the first show, I don't know what to say about a western or a quiz show, and I don't know anyone else who does either.'¹¹ Observing the shift to the continuing-character series, Crosby argued that television criticism itself was being made obsolete, and noted the departure of several critics from the field.

Equally striking was the reaction of many of television's most prominent playwrights; what the writers responded to most strongly was a perceived decline in the prestige of dramatic work in television. Veteran producer Worthington Miner told the Federal Communications Com-

⁶ Vance Bourjaily, 'The Lost Art of Writing for Video', *Harper's*, October 1959, p 157.

⁷ *New York Herald Tribune*, August 8, 1960.

⁸ Erik Barnouw, *The Television Writer*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1962, p 35.

⁹ Gilbert Seldes, *The Public Arts*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1956, p 190.

¹⁰ Gilbert Seldes, *Writing for Television*, New York, Doubleday, 1952, p 106.

¹¹ *New York Herald Tribune*, July 6, 1958.

¹² US Federal Communications Commission, Office of Network Study, *Second Interim Report: Television Network Program Procurement*, Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1965, p 587.

¹³ *ibid*, p 583.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p 632.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p 638.

¹⁶ Fund for the Republic, *The Relation of the Writer to Television*, Palo Alto, California, Fund for the Republic, 1960, p 12.

mission (FCC) in 1960 that the new telefilm writing 'really doesn't take much writer to do it, and no self-respecting writer will do it, certainly won't do it over his own name'.¹² 'While it is possible by this method to turn out good, stock entertaining films,' television writer Robert Alan Aurthur complained, 'it is quite impossible to turn out anything that has any intrinsic value.'¹³ Writer Ernest Kinoy argued that 'you cannot build a reputation either in the trade or in the public eye as a writer of episodes of a crime show or a western when your product is indistinguishable from the week before and the week after.'¹⁴ In 1960 Paddy Chayefsky summed up the feelings of many television writers when he reported that all the recent television offers he had received involved developing and supervising telefilm series:

*No writer who takes himself seriously wants to write the sort of thing that passes for a television series. I fault television, not for ignoring writers, but for failing to provide them with the sensation of stature that writers require if they are to think of themselves as artists. No writer wants to be known as the creator of a television series. The thing that a writer aspires to is to recognition as a poet, or at the very least as a social commentator. Television has offered writers notoriety, even money under new patterns of profit participation, but it has never offered pride. To this day I resent being known as a TV writer, and I should not think of again writing for television until the epitaph 'TV writer' did not bear a frightful connotation of lesser artist of apprentice artistry.*¹⁵

In addition to the extinction of live television anthology drama, the other subject of writers' complaint in the late '50s was what they viewed as the increasing constraints on free expression in the medium. Serling complained of sponsors arbitrarily removing the words 'American', 'lucky' and 'ford' in programmes supported by rival manufacturers. After an attempt to write a drama on contemporary race relations for *Playhouse 90*, which he complained was twisted beyond recognition by sponsor, agency and network personnel, Serling remarked: 'The result was that I was destroyed by this show professionally, I think, for about eleven or twelve months. People kept referring to me as "that guy who wrote that thing"'. It also stuck to me that I was now a controversial writer, so-called.'¹⁶

The mounting complaints over programme censorship from television writers found ready echoes in the columns of TV critics who saw themselves as natural allies of the playwrights in the struggle for prestige drama. From 1956 to 1958 the industry's response to the criticism was not entirely hostile. These years marked an unusual period of introspection and economic insecurity for network television. The economic fears were in part a product of the national economic recession of 1957-58 which slowed the growth of network advertising sales and suggested to some the decline of the networks' seller's market in advertising time. The penetration of television receivers over levels of ninety per cent in most parts of the country provoked wide fears of a saturated market. Finally, the industry reacted nervously to viewer surveys which

suggested a plateau in viewing levels and increasing viewer dissatisfaction with network programming. For some within the trade, the economic anxieties seemed connected to the writers' and critics' complaints of growing imitation and mediocrity in prime-time programming.

By the last two years of the '50s, however, the economic prospects for network television and the industry's response to public criticism were both quite different. By 1960 not only had the television industry rebounded from the economic slowdown of a few years earlier, it had entered into a new sustained period of high profitability, especially for the three TV networks. Advertising revenues, foreign and domestic syndication sales and other subsidiary profits grew enormously, encouraging the networks to make substantial investments in unrelated fields, including foreign television systems, amusement parks, publishing houses and major league baseball. Economic prosperity and confidence brought a new tone to the exchanges between network leaders and television critics by the end of the '50s.

Many of the late '50s public debates over the role of the television writer and critic, freedom of expression and programme formats were staged in the immediate context of the industry's string of business and regulatory scandals from 1958-60. The revelations of systematic fraud in television's quiz contests were merely a part of a public relations crisis for network television fueled by revelations of payola, news slanting and commercial bribery in broadcasting, and bribery and administrative fraud at the FCC. While the television industry lobbied successfully to block legislative and regulatory reform, it also responded more directly to the accumulated critical complaints regarding prime-time programming. The new network positions represented a break with the tone of critical exchanges of just a few years earlier and marked an end to the consensus of network leaders, critics, and television writers characteristic of television's Golden Age. Through the mid-'50s the two dominant networks, the most powerful actors in the television industry, had for their own economic and public relations reasons (essentially to protect their control of affiliates' prime-time and prevent threatening regulatory moves) endorsed the critics' ontology of live television and its privileged programme forms. The quiz show investigations therefore marked a moment of delayed recognition and disillusionment for many television writers and critics, setting the terms of cynicism and dismissal which have largely prevailed in subsequent exchanges between commercial television and its critics.

For many critics the quiz show fraud was symptomatic of the general state of the industry by the late '50s; John Crosby argued in 1960:

[T]he moral squalor of the quiz mess reaches clear through the entire industry The heavy hand of the advertiser suffocates truth, corrupts men and women. . . . The worst crumbs in the business are now in the saddle and the best and the most idealistic and creative men in the business either can't get work or they quit in disgust and go on to better things.¹⁷

¹⁷ 'He Who Throws Stones', *Broadcasting*, February 15, 1960, p 166.

¹⁸ *Variety*, November 2, 1960.

¹⁹ Quoted in Fairfax M Cone, *With All Its Faults: A Candid Account of Forty Years in Advertising*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1965, p 267.

²⁰ US Federal Communications Commission, op cit, p 546.

²¹ Quoted in Erik Barnouw, op cit, p 36.

²² 'Admen Retort Sharply to TV Writers' Diatribe', *Printer's Ink*, July 29, 1960, p 13.

²³ Robert Sarnoff, 'What Do You Want From TV?', the *Saturday Evening Post*, July 1, 1961, p 44.

²⁴ *Advertising Age*, June 4, 1962.

²⁵ John Martin, 'Television USA: Wasteland or Wonderland?', Pt 2, the *Saturday Evening Post*, October 28, 1961, p 60.

After the congressional hearings into the rigged quiz shows, *Variety's* television editor, George Rosen, wrote angrily: '[A]n exciting medium is going down the drain,' and blamed industry leaders for pursuing lowest-common-denominator programming.¹⁸ The popular image of network leadership in the '60s and '70s increasingly took on the coloration of the pre-auteurist Hollywood film industry, with the network programme executive in the former role of studio mogul.

In practical terms, the effects of the quiz scandals were to cement network dominance over programme producers and television advertisers and to reinforce the programming changes of the late '50s. The programmes which replaced the live, New York-produced, advertiser-licensed quiz shows were more Hollywood telefilms controlled by the networks. Moreover, the networks, protesting innocence in the quiz fraud ('We were merely taken in by a small group of deceitful people,' claimed NBC President Robert Kintner) and with promises to be 'masters in our own house' could put a reformist gloss on their redoubled efforts to control the markets in programme procurement and advertising sales.¹⁹

Erik Barnouw told the FCC in 1960: 'I don't remember any time in the last twenty-five years when writers in general in the broadcast field have been as bitter and disillusioned as they are at the present moment. . . .'²⁰ David Davidson, national chairman of the Writers Guild of America told the same panel: 'Never in history have so many writers been paid so much for writing so badly.'²¹

When Rod Serling and other television writers complained in 1960 of sponsor interference in dramatic scripts, trade reaction was swift to what one industry magazine labelled the 'TV writers' diatribe'. One advertising executive remarked that 'these comments of a few misanthropes who can't get along with the rest of the world and still do their work leads me to suspect their ability,' and another asked rhetorically: 'Why are they trying to prove their point? What's their motive? Why are they trying to discredit the American businessman? Who will gain from it?'²²

By 1960 network leaders were also dismissive of the dramatic values associated with television drama of the Golden Age. NBC President Robert Sarnoff in 1961 denounced television critics as 'dilettantes who bemoan the deterioration of TV since the early days.' 'Such talk is nostalgic nonsense,' Sarnoff maintained. The network head also attacked 'phony social philosophy in plays about beatniks and characters full of self pity' and 'serious dramas that are arty and pretentious'.²³ 'If we listened to the eggheads, we'd be out of business in six months,' Sarnoff remarked elsewhere.²⁴ CBS programme head James Aubrey told the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1961: 'Competition is fierce. The eggheads, they criticize no matter what, because in general they just don't like television. I'm a businessman.'²⁵

Much of the network counter-attack centred on the widespread critical complaints of 'program mediocrity'; Sarnoff told the National Association of Broadcasters in 1959 that 'we must label this slogan for what it really is, a failure to respect freedom of taste, an effort of the few to impose tastes upon

the many.' ABC President Leonard Goldenson remarked the following year that 'what puzzles me a great deal about the critics of TV is their persistent attack on the fundamental concept of the vote of the majority.' The most elegant formulation of television's commercial function in the rhetoric of political democracy was CBS President Frank Stanton's 1960 inversion of the language of the 1934 Communications Act: 'A program in which a large part of the audience is interested is by that fact a program in the public interest.'²⁶

The FCC's quiz show inquiry culminated in the testimony of the three network heads, who offered new accounts of commercial television's public responsibilities. A year earlier, David Sarnoff, head of NBC's parent corporation RCA, told television critic John Crosby that the network was 'in the position of a plumber laying a pipe. We're not responsible for what goes through the pipe.' His son Robert, head of NBC, remarked to a journalist in 1960 after the quiz show hearings: 'I'm not sure I know what it is that has to be reformed. I don't think anyone has proven that bad television is harmful.' ABC's Goldenson asked the FCC: 'Can we legislate taste? Can we make it a criminal offense to be mediocre? Shall we set up a commissar of culture?'²⁷

Television's dramatic writers felt the effects of the altered network environment more directly than any other group in the industry. Writer Robert Alan Aurthur declared at a symposium of TV writers in 1959: 'We were driven off television; we did not abandon television. Television abandoned us.'²⁸ Rod Serling told *Playboy* magazine in 1961 that he didn't blame television writers who left the medium for other fields: 'Television at its best is a kind of finger exercise for the more important things later on.'²⁹ Yet in 1959 Serling had remarked to a journalist:

*I guess I've probably been the most vocal of TV's detractors concerning censorship and sponsor interference. . . . The fact remains that television is an exciting medium. I won't leave it – it could happen that it might leave me.*³⁰

Given the new critical and economic context for the writer in commercial television by the end of the '50s, it is not surprising that Serling's public representations of his work on the telefilm series the *Twilight Zone* were ambivalent, alternately presented as a capitulation in his struggles as industry reformer or the logical outcome of his battles for serious television drama. While promoting the new series in 1959, Serling acknowledged the widespread critical suspicions that he had, in his words, 'chosen the path of the commercial writer to the one travelled by the discerning artist'. He continued: 'Professionally, I don't think the *Twilight Zone* will hurt me. But I must admit I don't think it will help me either. After all, it's a series primarily designed to entertain. Writing for it will certainly be much easier on me. It won't require the effort and probing a ninety-minute script does.'³¹

Beyond representing a move into the critically denigrated film format and half-hour programme length, the *Twilight Zone* also marked a renegotiation by Serling of the medium's commercial censorship pressures,

²⁶ Sarnoff quoted in Solomon Simonson, *Crisis in TV*, New York, Living Books, 1966, p 148; Goldenson quoted in *Broadcasting*, February 8, 1960, p 60; Stanton in US Federal Communications Commission, op cit, p 546.

²⁷ David Sarnoff quoted in Robert Austin Smith, 'TV: The Light That Failed', *Fortune*, September 1958, p 16; Robert Sarnoff quoted in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 21, 1960; Goldenson quoted in *Broadcasting*, February 8, 1960, p 62.

²⁸ 'The Future of Television Drama', *Film Culture* no 11 (1959), p 19.

²⁹ *Playboy*, November 1961, p 35.

³⁰ *New York Journal-American*, November 1, 1959.

³¹ *New York Daily News*, September 6, 1959.

³² Shelby Gordon, 'Traitor to My Class', *Mass Media*, July 1959.

³³ US Federal Communications Commission, *op cit*, p 542.

³⁴ 'The Weary Young Man', *Newsweek*, September 28, 1959, p 81; the *New York Times*, September 20, 1959; the *New York Herald Tribune*, August 8, 1960.

³⁵ Hubbell Robinson, 'TV: Myopia of the Small Screen', *Esquire*, July 1958, p 21.

at a time when such pressures were frequently cited in the exodus of many of television's most prominent playwrights. One network producer wrote in 1959: 'There were a few writers lucky enough to escape censorship altogether because they had nothing to express but platitudes anyway. A good many of them eventually became producers. . . . Today there's no censorship problem to speak of. New writers who are attracted to television generally have nothing to say. The rest of us have forgotten how to say it.'³² After praising the achievements of live drama writers in the earlier years of the decade, Erik Barnouw argued in 1960: 'The writers who did this work have gone away or been whittled down. The author of "Requiem for a Heavy-Weight" [Serling] now writes formula mysteries of the supernatural and even wins prizes for them, a symptom of the low estate to which television drama has fallen in just a few years.'³³

'We're no longer angry young men', Serling told *Newsweek* magazine in 1959. 'We're aging petulant ones. I'm tired of fighting the fight. It's a fight against advertisers, where we can't say certain things. . . . We tilted at the same dragons for seven or eight years and after the smoke cleared the dragons won.' Serling told the *New York Times*: 'I'm not writing any material that lies in the danger zone. There won't be anything controversial in the new series. . . . It no longer behooves us to bite the hand that feeds us. . . . I am not a meek conformist but a tired non-conformist. The facts of life are these: the creative person is not in control of a creative medium nor shall he ever be, except possibly in the legitimate theatre.' In 1960 Serling told another journalist: 'On the *Twilight Zone* I've had considerably more freedom of approach than in any other TV writing I've done. But much of this stems from my own pre-censorship—the fact that I'm knowledgeable about those areas which would create a storm and which are considered controversial. I simply don't touch those areas and as a result have far less trouble.'³⁴

In 1958 CBS executive Hubbell Robinson admitted the existence of what he called a 'soft underbelly' of mediocre programming, but argued that hope for the medium lay in men like Serling, whom Robinson called 'realists' who 'understand that the rules of the television jungle require that they speak in a language understandable to millions. They understand the advertisers who fit the bills are entitled to a fair shake. They understand that big budgets must deliver comparable ratings, but they have a built-in compulsion to deliver proud ratings too.'³⁵ By the end of the decade many observers wondered if the television industry was still interested in such distinctions.

At times Serling seemed to protest too much about the *Twilight Zone's* avoidance of controversial material; in 1962 *TV Guide* called the programme 'to the sponsor's way of thinking, easily the most bothersome show on the air'. Never a strong ratings success, the *Twilight Zone* was usually renewed by CBS and its sponsors at the last minute; *TV Guide* credited its longevity to the prestige of Serling's name and the programme's favourable critical reviews. The programme was also reputed to be a personal favourite of President Kennedy's new Chairman of the

FCC, Newton Minow, who briefly ruffled the industry with his 1961 characterisation of television programming as a 'vast wasteland'.³⁶

The economic arrangements of the *Twilight Zone* were typical of the economic role of the new writer-producer in the telefilm series. The programme was jointly owned by CBS and Cayuga Productions, of which Serling was half-owner. Serling was executive producer as well as chief writer for the series, and worked closely on casting, re-writes and post-production. Residuals from network reruns and foreign syndication based on Serling's ownership position and frequent scripts were substantial; when the programme went off the network in 1964 it had already earned over half a million dollars in foreign syndication, and other subsidiary revenues flowed from *Twilight Zone* novelisations, comic books and a board game. Foreign and domestic syndication revenues subsequently generated many times more such totals, and subsidiary income from more recent spin-offs in the form of a magazine and a feature film continue. It was precisely the possibilities of such subsidiary revenues which attracted networks, producers and writers to the telefilm series in the late 1950s and away from the single-play live drama which had little residual economic potential.

If the production format and business structure of the *Twilight Zone* are typical of the 'Hollywood television' widely scorned by many television writers and critics of the late 1950s, the programme's relation to the dramatic forms of television's earlier era of live drama are more complex. In many ways the *Twilight Zone* represents a compromise of the dramaturgy and reformist agenda of television's Golden Age with the structures of the thirty-minute film series. The structure of the *Twilight Zone* over the television season has more in common with the single-play dramatic anthologies of the early and mid-1950s than with the typical continuing-character episodic series; the programme lacks continuing characters, settings and even typical plots. The generic theme of the *Twilight Zone* is loosely organised, and has little to do with the traditional genre of television science fiction, which was predominantly a juvenile form in the '50s. Likewise, the *Twilight Zone* presents clear continuities of narrative voice, characterisations and a liberal didacticism which run through Serling's work throughout the '50s.

Perhaps the most striking inscription of the ambivalent role of the writer in late '50s dramatic television glimpsed through the *Twilight Zone* is in the nature of Serling's own appearances in the programme. The opening teaser and closing voice-over narration of each episode bracket the programme's narrative, often explicitly introducing the characters and narrative enigma for each episode, and emphasise the series' discrete, anthology format. Serling's narration differs from the traditional diegetic narrator of a programme like *Dragnet* as well as from the meta-diegetic ironist of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. Serling's characteristically stylised direct address and the frequently epigrammatic and moralistic closing voice-overs underscore the *authorial* quality of Serling's interventions. Moreover, the specific form of Serling's opening commentary in each episode, which usually playfully or ambiguously place

him temporarily in the space of the fiction, also serve as assertions of the agency of the fiction's author. It is perhaps this striking dramatisation of the ambiguous presence of the television writer that speaks most directly to the ambivalent position of the Golden Age playwright in the new age of 'Hollywood television'.

TELEVISION CRITICISM: 'A DISCOURSE IN SEARCH OF AN OBJECT'

JOHN CAUGHIE REFLECTS ON
ACADEMIC APPROACHES TO
TELEVISION

Not surprisingly, writing about television tends... to be very much a discourse in search of an object. Radically uncertain about what or whom it is addressing, television criticism significantly assumes its highest profile and, apparently, its greatest popularity precisely when enacting its own indirection in the pure display of a Clive James or the wilful eccentricity of a Nancy Banks-Smith.

THE QUOTATION COMES from Mike Poole's essay, 'The Cult of the Generalist: British Television Criticism, 1936-83'.¹ It's there to signal solidarity, acknowledging an agreement about the condition of television criticism which is basic enough for my article to forego radical originality and settle instead for the status of 'companion piece'. It was written as such, to complement Mike Poole's work as the basis for a discussion about British television criticism in the second of two events organised by the British Film Institute.² At the same time, it does involve a certain re-centring. What I am centrally concerned with is not the acknowledged failure of most television journalism to 'take television seriously', but rather the failure of theory and 'academic criticism' to elaborate the terms in which the 'seriousness' of television might be understood. Essentially, my argument is that 'academic' work on television (and I mean as wide a range of discourses by that formulation as I can get away with), while it has begun to develop a material sense of certain aspects of television, has not yet established either a theoretical or a methodological base from which to approach television as an articulation of institution, signifying system and culture.

Before trying to focus that failure, I want to make three brief observations directly related to Poole's article.

First, his essay is concerned with *British* television criticism, the condition of which he relates to the 'peculiarities of the larger cultural formation' (p42). The most peculiar feature of the cultural formation he

¹ Mike Poole, 'The Cult of the Generalist - British Television Criticism 1936-83', *Screen* March-April 1984, vol 25 no 2, p 47. (All further page references to this article will appear in parentheses in the text.)

² 'Television Criticism: Who Needs It?', *March* 21 and 28, 1984, at the National Film Theatre.

identifies as being 'the discursive hegemony that continues to be exercised by a literary tradition wholly disproportionate to its narrowing social base and contracting actual constituency' (p42). I agree entirely with this and will return to it below. My observation here, though, is that although the particular forms of inadequacy can be attributed to the peculiarities of the national cultural formation, the inadequacy itself is completely international. In fact, on the basis of trying, a few years ago, to find material for a collection of non-British television criticism, I suspect that British television criticism may be (with the probable exception of Latin American writing) the least worst in the world. The formal organisation of television, and its uncertain cultural status, seems to be resistant to any known critical tradition.

Second, in searching for an object for its discourse, it's worth noting that television criticism is often at its most effective when dealing, not with the evaluation of programmes, but with the routine construction of events which cannot be seen in preview theatres. Even a Clive James can uncover the dramatic structure of an Election Night Special. And Julie Davidson, whose weekly column in the *Glasgow Herald* provides a model of what newspaper criticism might do, can use Coal Board chairman Ian MacGregor's televised tumble when confronted by picketing miners ('O what a fall was there, my countrymen') and Margaret Thatcher's 'sorrow and horror' reaction to it ('Margaret has murdered language') as a provocation for eight column inches of extremely accessible writing on the relation of television and language:

*The history of coal mining is familiar with tragedies, some of them great, and indeed the death-throes of the industry could be called a social tragedy. Mr MacGregor's pit-head collapse is hardly in the same rhetorical class.*³

This is to uncover television's claim to be a relay, and to begin to talk about representation. It's a proper function of television criticism, exposing the routines and their effects in a way which largely eludes the criticism of television's more conscious constructions, and it steps outside the symbiotic relationship between television and the critic which the preview day ('Elkan's Day') seems to invite.

Third, there is a question about the relationship between 'academic' criticism and 'journalistic' criticism, and about the systems of transmission between them. To begin with, however heart-warming it may or may not be, I think we have to resist the utopian vision of Clive James, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and clutching his copy of *Screen*, led by the hand through the Elysian Fields of Dean Street into the rising sun of theory. More seriously, Mike Poole quite correctly says of academic film studies that its 'impact' on television criticism 'has been negligible' (p48). Now the desire for impact is essential to academic work if it is not to be merely academicist and scholastic; but embedded in the word there does seem to be a nostalgia (which I think I probably share) for the 'impact' of *Scrutiny* on literary study in the thirties, the 'impact' of *Cahiers du Cinéma* on film criticism in the fifties and sixties, the impact

³ Julie Davidson, 'One Small Trip for a Coal Board Chairman', *Glasgow Herald*, February 25, 1984.

of *New Left Review* in the sixties, or of *Screen* in the seventies: a nostalgia for a body of academic writing which will transform not only academic practice, but which will shift the grounds of culture, re-articulating the discursive hegemony. The model is of a dynamic and forceful subject impacting on an inert and supine object, and moving it on. What the nostalgia for impact tends to conceal is that in all the quoted instances the result was not the break-up of hegemonic power, but simply a new discursive hegemony; in many instances a new, and more exclusive, discursive terrorism. For this reason, if for no other, the system of transmission between the academic and the journalistic ought to be conceived and practiced as a two-way process, a to-ing and fro-ing between the abstract and the concrete, the general and the particular, the distance of theory continually confronted by the immediacy of the day-to-day practices, procedures and preoccupations of television and the actual people who work in and around it. This is to say that I do not think that television theory and criticism are alive and well in the academy waiting to be called to the rescue, but rather that academic theory and criticism are themselves peculiarly ill-equipped to deal with the 'seriousness' of television, and that they need journalism as much as journalism needs them. This is a rather pious commonplace, but it does seem important to me to insist that, for television particularly, academic writing needs a sense of investigating and reporting as much as television journalism needs some theoretical foundation. In this sense, it seems important to me that there are a number of working journalists, including Mike Poole, on the present editorial board of *Screen*.

(I should say here, parenthetically, that, as a working academic in the same sense that Mike Poole is a working journalist, I have the same misgivings about how to use the notion of 'the academic' as he might have around the notion of 'the journalistic'. I would like to think that 'academic' is to 'academicist' as 'empirical' is to 'empiricist', but it's never that easy to shake off privilege. In any case, I am using the term here to cover a wide range of diverse but always institutionally constrained educational and critical discursive practices: *Screen*, *Sight and Sound*, *Media, Culture and Society*, *Framework*, formal education, evening classes, BFI Summer Schools, National Film Theatre lunchtime discussions. . . .)

What I propose to do now is to attempt to identify some of the peculiarities which have produced the kinds of television theory and criticism which we now have, and, more importantly, which have produced the gaps and the absences. Much of what I want to say has to do with the critical histories within which television writing has developed, but the intention is topographical: trying to get a sense of where we are by tracing something of the route by which we got here.

Film studies and television

Mike Poole identifies the failure of academic film studies to develop 'a fully materialist analysis' which could theorise the day-to-day operations

of institutions as one of the two major historical failures in the development of a theory which could 'redefine the terrain of television criticism' – the other failure being the failure of television itself 'to be even mildly self-reflective'. Instead of the necessary materialist analysis, he argues,

film studies was engaged in a struggle to establish its own academic credibility and correspondingly prone to the kind of arcane discourse that would 'professionalise' it within the academy, thus limiting its impact and intelligibility almost everywhere else. . . . (p47)

This is a very familiar criticism, and it has been going on for long enough that even the most devoted disciple of discourse and deconstruction has to take it seriously. It's fairly clear that the intervention which film theory sought in the seventies was substantially limited in its political and cultural reach by the language in which it was formulated. But it is important to be clear about what was at stake in language. While it's surely true to say that, in a general way and in some quite specific ways (the BFI lectureships), the establishment of film studies courses and departments did benefit from, and probably shamelessly exploited, the specialisation of language and the professionalisation of intellectual debates (though in my own university Bazin and Eisenstein were about as arcane as you could get), it doesn't seem to me to be adequate to say that film studies was prone to 'arcane discourse' simply because it wanted to establish 'its own academic credibility'. Nor was it simply a few Cambridge academics who had spent too much time in France. There was also a quite genuinely motivated battle to transform critical language from the humanistic anti-theory of Leavisite literary criticism into a more sophisticated, rigorous, theoretical, even 'scientific' discourse. To use the vocabulary of the time, the ideological struggle at the level of cultural criticism was being waged around language. Post-'68 film theory could not reconstitute its object in the available critical language, any more than post-revolutionary Soviet cinema could simply take over bourgeois forms. Or so it seemed at the time. The battle with the Leavisite heritage was a battle precisely about discursive hegemony, and the point of attack was not simply ideas but the vocabulary and the discursive forms in which the ideas and the assumptions were simultaneously concealed and revealed. To concede language, to offer the meta-discourse, was to sell the pass.

It's easier to see now that the difficulties of the new 'arcane discourse' were also a symptom of the intensification of the academic hold on the cultural hegemony; a kind of concentration of intellectual capital in the hands of an academic cartel. But we also have to recognise that, within the rhetoric of revolution and intervention, there was a sense of taking on the dominant critical assumptions. However distant the battle may now seem, it does seem to me to be important that the formation of film theory, and the development in education of the film studies which gave its allegiance to theory, was not simply (maybe not even primarily) about

understanding cinema, but was also an attempt to contest the place which Leavisite literary criticism occupied as the totalising discipline of English culture.

In 1968, in his very influential article, 'Components of the National Culture', Perry Anderson had remarked the disarray of the components of culture around an absent centre:

*the very notion of the totality is banned. The various traditional disciplines ... cluster about an absent centre – what should have been the emergence of a classical sociology or a national Marxism. Lacking this centre, they form a vicious circle of self-reproducing fragmentation and limitation. The record of mediocrity has been overwhelming. When neither society nor man are anywhere put in question, culture stops. In England, it has gradually slowed towards zero point.*⁴

The space which should have been filled by a classical sociology or a national Marxism was, argued Anderson, occupied in England only by anthropology under Leach, and, amazingly, by English literary criticism under Leavis. These were the only disciplines which were attempting, in very uneven and even reactionary ways, to put in question society and human relations in their totality.

*With [Leavis], English literary criticism conceived the ambition to become the vaulting centre of 'humane studies and of the university'. English was 'the chief of the humanities'.*⁵

It's in the immediate context of Anderson's analysis that film theory begins to contest the Leavis tradition, reserving its very particular wrath for the Leavisites within its own ranks. In such a context, it's possible to see the confrontation with Leavis as something more than an academic squabble or a campaign for academic credibility, but as a struggle, within the political terms of 1968 and its aftermath, for discursive hegemony within the absent totalising centre of the English cultural formation. Film theory's various searches for objects – theories of realism, of authorship, of representation, of ideology, of sexuality – were, for better or worse, searches for totalising theories which didn't simply explain cinema, but which sought to re-articulate the objects of criticism from reflection to production, from creativity to subjectivity, from felicities of style to systems of signification, from morality to ideology and sexuality. At most points during the seventies, it seemed more important to understand representations than simply to understand the institutional day-to-day functioning of cinema.

It's worth adding here the other term of this action – cultural studies – which had been in the field for rather longer, since the early sixties, taking its intellectual leadership from Williams and Thompson, finding its institutional home in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and engaging in the same kind of contest with Leavis for the absent centre of the totality, though, significantly, shifting the centre

⁴ Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', *New Left Review* no 50, July-August 1968, p 46.

⁵ *ibid*, p 50.

onto different ground. Film studies and cultural studies, did succeed, at least within the 'left academy', in shifting the centre a little, moving it away from the high culture/low culture dichotomy. But at the same time they inhabited the new space in tension with each other, circling the totality, skirmishing over essentialisms, empiricisms and theoreticisms, continually redefining the concept of ideology, the anti-humanist 'line' of film studies suspicious of the culturalist and class reductionist tendencies of cultural studies. But the tensions were broadly productive, sharing at least a sense of what was at stake.

This detour through academic history is not intended as a justification of the development of film theory or film studies. Other versions of the history are possible, and necessary, which would show dogmatism, theoretical and linguistic terrorism, frightening elitism, and simple error. Even charitable histories tend to look back on the interventionist rhetoric and the theoretical certainties of the mid-seventies with some degree of embarrassment. But what I am trying to show is that, however misguidedly and despite absurd gaps around audiences and institutions, film theory and film studies constituted a theoretical, and, in strictly academic terms, a political engagement with dominant critical and cultural discourses: there was the concept of a theoretical project, and something more was involved in film theory than simply a theory of film. The reason I think this is important is because it poses the question of what is involved in television theory: what is the object of its discourse?

My feeling is that television theory and criticism would define its object more narrowly. It emerged at a time when the vigorous critical and ideological struggles of the post-'68 period had been negotiated into various agreements to differ. If there was a contest for hegemony it was with media sociology, but this was a more local struggle, at at least one remove from the centre. Television theory and criticism developed, astonishingly late, in a slightly uneasy relationship with film studies, rather than in the vigorously oppositional relationship with another central, hegemonic critical tradition. Its late development may have been the formative factor: like many late developers, a lot of its energy went into seeking recognition. If film theory was formed in an engagement with the discourse of literary criticism over an absent centre, television theory's problem was with an absent critical discourse. The project of a great deal of academic writing seemed to be simply to 'take television (and particularly popular television) seriously'.

The critical writing that emerged out of film theory in the late seventies (it is as recent as that) showed initial signs of an attempt to appropriate television to the discourse of film theory. The *Sweeney* issue in *Screen Education* in 1976⁶ and the article by Gillian Skirrow and Stephen Heath on *World in Action* which appeared in *Screen* in 1977⁷ brought to the analysis of television much of the language of narrative and subjectivity which had been developed within film theory; they belonged, if you like, within the 'arcane discourse' mode. Progressively, though, writing on television began to develop its own specificity around questions of the television institutions, the television audience, and the structure of view-

⁶ *Screen Education* no 20, Autumn 1976.

⁷ Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow, 'Television, a World in Action', *Screen* Summer 1977, vol 18 no 2, pp 7-59.

ing. Significantly, a considerable body of critical work was developed on popular forms of television: genre studies of soap opera, police series and sit-coms. It is quite striking that one of the most under-theorised areas of film theory – genre – should become one of the primary objects of television writing. Not that that body of writing yet adds up to a theory of genre for television; certainly not in the sense that authorship was theorised for film. But it is very interesting that what was at stake was less the genre as a formal and aesthetic category and more the notion of the popular: in developing its own specific object, academic television criticism and theory moved almost invariably to the social, whether it was talking about audiences, institutions or generic forms. Its intervention, and its confrontation with film theory, was to socialise – even perhaps to sociologise – the formal.

There are some extremely good reasons for this. Critical writing about television developed at a time when the theoreticist and idealist tendencies of film theory were beginning to be uncovered under the interventionist rhetoric. Equally important, in its very material social *presence* television seemed to demand some recognition of a sociology of audiences, institutions and even forms. Some kind of accommodation had to be (quite cautiously) negotiated with the sociology, even with the empirical sociology, which film theory had always rigorously resisted. Again, in a quite complex way, there was a question of who television criticism at an academic level might be addressing itself to. This had never been a particular problem for film theory. Its constituency had been defined in terms of educationists, 'cultural workers' and independent film-makers. Its purchase on the commercial film industry was less than negligible. But in television, there was the suspicion that someone somewhere might be listening. Alliances might be made (a few were made), and writing about television might make a difference – in the social, rather than in the purely academic. This possibility, and the responsibility which goes with it, brought difficult demands on television writing for tactical theory in tactful language which everyone could understand. It also forced theory to consider questions of address and style of writing. Most importantly, it contributed to a developing sense of self-consciousness about 'know-nothing' theory which had seemed to be sanctioned by the anti-empiricism of the early seventies in a quite scandalous confusion of empirical research and empiricism. There now seems to be a real commitment to developing an empirical foundation for writing about television, and in this working journalists like Mike Poole, John Wyver, Carl Gardner and, in a different way, Peter Fiddick have played an important part. All of these shifts represented substantial advances in the development of a materialist theory of television, and it seems to me that they have also affected the ways in which it is possible to think about cinema.

There are also some negative factors which need to be taken into account in understanding the shape which critical writing about television took. Mike Poole refers to television's reluctance to be self-reflective. Perhaps even more important is the almost complete absence of any historical sense of the development of television programmes and televi-

sion style. I want to develop this point later, but it is fairly clear that the absence of an archive which would have allowed an examination of the various transformations of television as a discourse, coupled with television's own insistence on being immediate and up-to-the-minute, has tended to place television and television criticism in a perpetual present.

Secondly, and very tentatively, the pleasures of television seem to be more relaxed pleasures, lacking the seductiveness and the excess of cinema. Writing about pleasure on television frequently seems to be about other people's pleasure: how do ordinary people read *Nationwide*; why do women like *Crossroads*. Again, the questions are social rather than personal. There does not seem to be that rigorous attention to formal systems, which, in film theory, often suggests a writer trying to come to terms with his or her own pleasure, trying to nail it down in order to get a critical distance from it.

Broadly, then, the object of television criticism was 'television itself' rather than the conquest of the critical hegemony or a general theory of representations or of pleasure. Television seemed to matter more in itself than cinema now did, certainly more than Hollywood entertainment cinema, and writing about television seemed to be more of a social responsibility than a coming to terms with pleasure and fascination. Waking quite suddenly with a shock to the pressing and contemporary 'seriousness' of television, television theory, late and thin on the ground, had to concentrate its collective mind on the social force of television. Potentially, this concentration brought to a theory of representations that material sense of actual audiences, as opposed to positioned spectators, and actual institutions, as opposed to regimes of discourse, which film theory had lacked.

But it is very important to recognise that television theory also had its own substantial structuring absences. If a sense of loss creeps into this article it is not simply a nostalgia for Classic Film Theory and the totality, or for the heady days of the cultural struggle. Rationally, I have real doubts about totalistic disciplines and general theories. What I think has been lost, however, is the desire for a detailed theoretical understanding of television as a specific signifying system. The urgency of the social has made it difficult for television criticism to develop a body of writing on categories like realism, narrative, identification, subjectivity, voyeurism, modernism. The words appear quite frequently, but largely they have been appropriated as given categories rather than debated in their specificity for television. Many of the terms are inappropriate, all of them need to be rewritten. This is not to say that television theory has to follow the pattern which film theory set. Clearly the structure of viewing of television, and the diversity of its programmes require a very specific critical approach which is difficult to determine in advance. But it is nevertheless puzzling that television theory seems to have disengaged itself from, if not actually forgotten, substantial questions about the production of meaning which seemed central to an understanding of film. There is no sense of the rhetoric of television or of the specific articulations of the look, and even the more general concept of *mise-en-scène* has

been reduced to generic conventions; identification seems to have returned perilously close to a synonym for sympathy, and distanciation has become a mechanical concept; pleasure tends to lose its place within rhetoric and to take on a much more general sense of enjoyment; and naturalism, one of the most important terms for television fiction, has been handed down on tablets of stone, hypostasised rather than theorised. Undoubtedly, changes of meaning and of emphasis are significant and necessary and have to do with the specificity of television, but they don't appear as efforts of rewriting or as the results of critical debate, but simply as effects of slippage. Crucially, again, the absence of any sense of television's past makes it extremely difficult to follow the process of the construction of formal routines, and the development of signifying practices.

I am aware that the language I am using is the language of a particular formalist period of film theory; but this is not a plea for a return to theoretical purity. Film theory in the seventies was material in its analysis of forms and signification, but disastrously idealist in its abstraction of audiences and institutions. Television theory at least seeks (if it doesn't always find) a material understanding of audiences and institutions, but it is hopelessly general about forms. One absence has been exchanged for the other, and there is still no way of holding together the production, distribution and consumption of meanings in a truly materialist way. The movement from Classic Film Theory to television theory has been the swing of a pendulum, rather than a real dialectical engagement. John Ellis's book, *Visible Fictions*,⁸ suggests some of the ways in which that engagement might be thought through.

⁸ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

Popular culture

Something has to be said about the relation of television and popular culture. This has been a very important area of work, and it has produced some extremely useful writing. It is also the one significant area in which television criticism has engaged with a wider cultural debate. What I want to do here, however, is to signal very briefly a couple of reservations.

Firstly, I think the danger has to be noted that the popular can become the guarantee of politics, and that attention to programmes and programme categories with high ratings can become a politically self-justifying imperative. The attention to popular forms of television, and, in particular, to the ways in which specific audiences use them, seems often to depend on a notion of genre as an internally consistent system of meanings and conventions. But genre is a difficult category for television since its meanings are not simply internal to it, but are always dependent on its place within the system of meanings of television as a whole. Just as it is inappropriate for journalistic reviewers to treat a single play as if it were an isolated event, so it seems to me that more thought has to be given to the place of popular forms within the hierarchy of discourses

which operates below the phenomenal appearance of 'flow', constructing different kinds of attention.

Secondly, and more importantly, there are the very real and confusing problems of the notion of popular culture itself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers several senses of the word 'popular': the etymological sense, 'belonging to the people', 'of, pertaining to the people', 'constituted or carried on by the people'; a derivative sense, 'intended for or suited to ordinary people', 'adapted to the understanding or taste of ordinary people'; and a consequent sense, 'finding favour with or approved by the people; liked, beloved or admired by the people, or by people generally'. The move from the property *of* the people, through packaging *for* the people, to consumption *by* the people indicates some of the historical and simultaneous shifts with which the idea of a popular culture has to cope. Clearly, within developed commodity capitalism it would be utopian to hold out for the first sense against the other two, but in settling for consumerist notions of popular culture there should be some of the uneasiness of an historical compromise, and a hesitation about a meaning naturalised by capitalism. This signals a reservation about a celebration of popular television: a culturalist desire to respect what is 'liked, beloved or admired by the people', collapsing that back into 'belonging to the people' or 'constituted by the people' without passing through 'adapted to the understanding or taste of ordinary people'. The polemical drive to establish popular television as 'serious' seems frequently to appear as a *support* for popular television because it is watched by millions of ordinary people, without a very careful scepticism about the procedures which are brought to bear in constituting that popularity, and the adaptations which it involves.

What is to be done?

I said at the beginning that I agreed almost entirely with Mike Poole's critique of journalistic television criticism. I haven't attempted to extend that specific critique, or to suggest the way ahead (though I have suggested that academic and journalistic criticism have to be more intricately related) because it seems to me that his article, and, indeed, his practice in the *Listener*, indicate the need for journalists to approach television as an extremely complex set of institutions and practices, and to approach reviewing as a process of understanding and elucidating television rather than as a simple evaluation of programmes as isolated events or as a *belle lettriste* display of smart-ass subjectivity. What I have attempted to do instead is to extend his critique into a dissatisfaction with academic writing.

The terms of that dissatisfaction may need pointing. I am emphatically not arguing for a redirection of television theory back towards aesthetic debates and away from its concern with the material, the social and the popular. If there is a dissatisfaction in that area it is that much of the writing about institutions and audiences is still technical and purely empirical, and does not yet constitute a materialist approach. Neverthe-

less, all the things which are already being done should continue to be done. The popular should continue to be focused and re-focused, we need much more information about institutions, and a much better understanding of audiences. In particular, the policy debates which are beginning to appear in *Screen* and in *Media, Culture and Society* should be extended, and institutions and journals and the press should open these debates up to a much wider public. In all of these areas the relationship between journalism and academic writing is extremely important.

Where the dissatisfaction comes, I suppose, is finally with television theory's failure to engage dialectically with the film theory of the seventies. Rather than confronting its past productively, a great deal of television theory and criticism seems to be trying to reject the unwanted parent at the same time as tying itself to its terminological apron-strings. The result is a very generalised, and sometimes quite inappropriate sense of the discourses of television. We still don't really understand the very basic and specific formal operations of television within and across its programme categories: the organisation of the look, continuity editing, the differences between mixing and editing, the construction of space, camera movement, sound and image. These have never been simply formal questions, and, if they don't simply construct spectators in quite the way that Classic Film Theory thought, they do touch on questions of identification and pleasure. Even the concept of 'flow', one of the very few indigenous terms of television writing, hasn't been developed much beyond the point that Raymond Williams took it to in 1973.⁹ And something finally has to be done about television 'naturalism'. These are not alternatives to work on audiences and institutions, but work on audiences and institutions is unreliable if it simply replaces a concern with signification and representation, or assumes a homogeneity across film and television.

At the risk of being programmatic, I want to end with three immediate propositions in response to the question of what is to be done.

1. The absence of history from academic and journalistic writing about television seems to me to be critical. The insistence on history, and the concern about its absence, is not simply an academic whine about gaps in research or an antiquarian fascination with the past, but is part of a desire to be able to understand the movements of television and the continual re-workings and re-shapings of its relationship to the wider culture. The development of some detailed and retrospective sense of the development of television seems to me to be an absolute priority for critical writing, involving a history of forms, of scheduling, of institutions, and of the shifting relations with audiences, the national culture and the State. To write about television is almost always to write about now, the current, and, occasionally, the future: mini-series, the recolonisation of India, Channel Four, *Brookside*, the crisis in public service broadcasting, and, almost at the edge of memory, the Falklands/Malvinas. Television continually moves on, and to be still talking about drama documentary or the Annan Report in 1984 is to be left behind. But to understand television properly, or to understand anything properly, we need to be able

⁹ But see John Ellis, *ibid.*

to take it out of its frozen historical moment and see the formative shifts and transformations and ask why they happen. The way to understand 'flow' might be to consider the shifts from the Potter's Wheel and Sylvia Peters, through advertising, to Channel Four. This would do more than explain a particular formal procedure at a particular time; it would give some sense of the shifts between television and its audience. Such work means more than a commitment of attention. It also means a commitment of resources to the provision of archive material on as widely available a basis as possible. For the television companies, additionally, it might mean the re-screening of some of their past.

2. The question continually arises of a television journal. There's clearly a lot to be said for the idea. It would allow space for the development of specialised writing, and, most importantly, it might open a space in which the work of academic writers, journalists and television producers might develop together. At the very least, the balance between writing about cinema and writing about television will have to shift. But the logic of the position which argues for a closer dialectic between film and television theories surely argues against a division into separate specialist journals. And the logic of history may be on the same side. At a time when film and television (as distinct from cinema and television) are becoming harder and harder to tell apart—think of *Film on Four*, the *Eleventh Hour*, and the prospect of Home Box Office on cable—it would seem somewhat contrary if film writing and television writing were to retreat into their individual ghettos. There is also, I suppose, a question of old loyalties: an academic specialist film journal in the late 1980s would very quickly become an academicist absurdity.

3. Finally, and quite simply, changes will very urgently have to be made in copyright legislation in order to legalise the teaching of television. Without that, the academic pursuit of television could become a very solitary confinement.

CIRCLES

Women's Film and Video Distribution



NEW ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE NOW AVAILABLE

- comprehensive information on over 80 films and videos by women from 1913 to the present day
- fiction and documentary films on a variety of subjects including: women and representation, health, sexuality, history, work etc.
- price £1.50 from Circles

113 Roman Road, London E2 0HU. Telephone (01) 981 6828

Video Data Bank



The *Video Data Bank* provides research materials on contemporary art.

On Art and Artists: A collection of 200 videotaped interviews, performances, documentations, and experimental forums with artists and critics. Annotated catalog \$2.

Video Tape Review: A collection of 200 video art works which reflect both early video aesthetics and state-of-the-art advancements in video technology. Annotated catalog free.

Profile: A bi-monthly publication featuring transcripts from the On Art and Artists collection as well as current bibliographies, photographs of the artists' works, and often unpublished writings by or about the artists. Subscription \$9 individuals; \$18 institutions.

All tapes are available for rental or purchase for non-commercial use on 3/4" NTSC or PAL from the *Video Data Bank*, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Columbus Drive at Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois 60603, 312/443-3793.

WHOSE TELLY ANYWAY?

ROBIN GUTCH REPORTS FROM A RECENT CONFERENCE ON ACCESS TELEVISION

The question is... not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates them. A revolutionary plan should not require the manipulators to disappear; on the contrary, it must make everyone a manipulator.

(Hans Magnus Enzensburger¹)

Only within the paranoid nightmares of television executives could access television constitute part of a revolutionary plan. Yet, right from its inception in 1983, it has always been regarded as a thorn in the institutional flesh. Nevertheless 'access' has survived the increasingly illiberal political climate for over ten years. Although always contained by its marginal status within broadcasting, it has engaged with some of the difficulties entailed in making 'everyone a manipulator'. About 90 people attended the May British Film Institute conference 'Whose Telly Anyway?'² to critically assess both the achievements and limitations of the first decade of 'access', and to generate debate about how it should be developed in what is a very different media system from when the first *Open Door* was broadcast by the BBC in the spring of 1973.

Chaired by Stuart Hood, the event began with a presentation on the history of access TV and some of its problematics from Peter Lewis, which was then discussed by Graham Murdoch. BBC Community Programme Unit Editor Mike Fentiman introduced a screening of brief excerpts from 18 past *Open Door* and *Open Space* programmes, an eclectic offering covering a vast range of subjects and presentations: from a live studio direct-to-camera presentation about cystitis to The Other Cinema's lyrical, Medvedkin-quoting plea for an alternative film

culture. The screening was followed by discussion on the 'access experience' with producers and 'contributors' (note the terms). The afternoon session began with Channel 4 Commissioning Editor Alan Fountain introducing a selection of the Channel's 'access' material, such as Television History Workshop's *Making Cars* and the Irish Video Workshop's *The Irish in England*. Another discussion preceded a further screening from the Community Programme Unit (CPU) of *Open Doors* which had been 'at the limit' of the BBC's (un)willingness to keep the door open: programmes such as the Campaign Against Racism in the Media's 'It Ain't Half Racist, Mum', and the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom's 'Why Their News is Bad News'. The event concluded with a panel discussion involving Mike Fentiman, Alan Fountain and BBC Current Affairs Assistant Editor George Carey.

Thus the day's schedule effectively defined 'Access Television' as access to *broadcast* television. Given the urgency of mounting a strong campaign for statutory access to cable this was a serious omission, making difficult discussion of the relative merits of different modes of production and distribution. In fact this definition was at least partially ruptured by the unscheduled screening of a video from Swindon Viewpoint about an *Open Space* programme recently made by the CPU in Swindon.

The event should have been especially valuable due to the current volatility of the whole communications sector: the trans-national restructuring of communications capital which threatens the very notion of a 'public' sphere of broadcasting; a State extending its power over the production and distribution of video cassettes in the Video Recordings Bill yet refusing to recognise the need for accountability and access

¹ 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media', in Denis McQuail (ed), *Sociology of Mass Communications*, London, Penguin, 1972, p 107.

² Held on May 12, 1984, in the National Film Theatre.

in cable television; the regression of Channel 4 into ITV's equivalent of BBC 2 without snooker; yet also the increasing willingness of the media unions to intervene in the editorial process as with the printworkers' recent actions to secure a right of reply for mineworkers' leader Arthur Scargill: in this conjuncture there could be no more relevant question than 'Whose Telly Anyway?'.

So it is difficult to explain quite why the event was so unsatisfactory. There was certainly sufficient consensus among the participants to answer with an equally rhetorical and colloquial 'it's ours, not yours!' But it must be questionable whether the enormous political problem of the ownership and control of the means of television production is best posed within the context of a discussion about 'access TV'. The tokenism of access as presently constituted necessarily entails that debate about access as a television 'genre' cannot be easily extrapolated into addressing the more fundamental issue of transforming the present structures of television control, a transformation necessarily dependent on changes in the whole social formation. As one participant suggested, a more useful debate might have centred on the best oppositional use of the few spaces available. Such an admittedly narrower agenda might have prevented the event dissolving, as it did, into diffuseness and its corollary of defeatism.

The event's relative lack of success was generated by both organisational difficulties and the discursive contradictions embodied in the very term 'access'. The unfortunate scheduling clash with a weekend conference of the Independent Film and Video Makers Association almost removed that constituency most critical of 'access'; fortunately a few participants were able to voice some of those criticisms, but the under-representation of the independents was a severe loss. Equally unfortunate was the outrageous price of admission. A rightfully aggrieved contributor to *Something Else* (CPU's teenage access programme) pointed out the glaring irony: who could have 'access' to such a debate when entry cost £7.50 with the generous reduction of £1.00 for the unemployed? Furthermore this extortionate amount merely gained one the dubious advantages of the National Film Theatre as a venue. Without being architecturally determinist the spatial relationships of a cinema would seem specifically designed to encourage

certain modes of public discourse – celebration, interrogation, gladiatorial debate – at the expense of inhibiting the dialectical and collective. The acoustics constituted a further barrier to communication, compounded by having to either turn one's head 180° to see a speaker or admire the back of their heads. The adoption of the *Question Time* format of Panel and Audience (without even *Question Time*'s token woman) accentuated these physical difficulties with its setting up of a discursive hierarchy between 'knowledge' and opinion.

The heterogeneous attendance also posed discursive problems which were particularly pronounced in the morning session. While media academics, 'professional' broadcasters and independent programme-makers share a common vocabulary to a certain extent, much of the academic presentations must have been alienating for the representatives from community groups and participants in past 'access' programmes. Given this diversity, perhaps it was not a wise decision to begin with two academic 'overviews' of 'Access TV'. Judging by the looks of bafflement, bemusement or boredom on many faces, they were not an engaging beginning, however valuable in an academic setting. Much of the useful historical information in Peter Lewis's presentation could have been available in a printed handout. And was it really productive for participants in past *Open Doors* to be told that, within the terms of Jakobson's paradigm of the communication process, the messages of their texts were dominated by the phatic function? The demystification of the production process is one of the rationales for 'access'; it seems ironic that the event began with what for many must have been a re-mystification.

The function of the screenings was also problematic. Their presentation on a cinema screen (rather than the TV monitor for which they were originally produced) set up a different relationship between text and viewer from that operating during their original transmission. More importantly the screening of short excerpts from numerous programmes with little contextualisation almost precluded the discussion of specific texts. Beyond an acknowledgement of the 'diversity' made possible by 'access' there could be little critical engagement at a textual level.

A more valuable approach might have been

comparative screenings: for instance, substantial excerpts from a *Panorama* on the Miners' strike; an *Open Space*, 'Coal not Dole' made with the NUM; and the NUM workshop-produced *News from Durham* or *Where Are We Going?* could have been shown. The comparative screening of different treatments of a common subject made under different modes of production and distribution could have posed a series of questions about 'authorship', 'audience', '*mise-en-scène*', 'pleasure' (often conspicuous in its absence from access programming), leading onto the relationships between texts and their mode of production and what is politically at stake in those relationships.

However the intrinsic difficulty posed in organising any form of discussion about access television is the discursive confusion which surrounds the term 'access'. This confusion results from the mythology which has successfully allowed the television institutions to define 'access' as a 'genre' within the television 'mix' rather than as an alternative mode of production which questions mainstream television production. 'Access' is a mythical genre; the lack of correspondence or continuities in programme content or *mise-en-scène* makes their scheduling in one slot absurd.

The only common factor in 'access' programmes is the active participation of 'non-professionals' in the production process. Other television genres are defined by their subject or *mise-en-scène* (current affairs/religion/documentary), while their mode of production is deemed irrelevant to their classification—it is just neutral professionalism. 'Access' television, however, is defined by its mode of production alone; its content is incidental. As long as it remains a genre it will be successfully contained as 'opinion', 'subjective' television which serves the double function of inoculating the audience against ideological contamination and also paradoxically reinforces the myth of professional neutrality. For if there is access television then there must be non-access television as well. The reality behind the mythology is that all television is access television and the question the mythology conceals, as Alan Fountain indicated, is who has access to say what and on whose terms to what audience and with what resources?

The conceptual difficulties of discussing 'access' within the framework of this mythology

are increased by the competing models of 'access' in circulation. Broadly speaking, three different modes of production are abstractly discernible which could be designated as 'hands-on' access, 'mediated' access and 'representative' access.

The 'purist' model of access is where the 'accesses' are given 'hands-on' control of the technical hardware after a brief initiation into its operation. Several US cable stations still operate such a system. In Britain this mode of production has been most fully developed in the community video sector. While no one advocates that a 'naive' version of 'hands-on' will resolve the contradictions involved in access production, it is stressed that 'real' access is only possible if the accesses have a certain level of audio-visual 'literacy'.

'Mediated' access is when accesses work in partnership with 'professionals'. The BBC's Community Programme Unit most fully exemplifies this mode of production, though several commercial TV companies such as Harlech and Tyne Tees have experimented with it. The CPU and its series *Open Door* were established in 1973 to give networked airtime to 'voices, attitudes, and opinions that, for some reason or another, have been unheard or seriously neglected by mainstream television'. Groups or individuals contact the Unit if they want a programme and, if selected (selection is done by the Unit at meetings monitored by outside observers), they are involved in the production process from script to editing and transmission. The survival of *Open Door* and its successor *Open Space* in an institution which can talk paternalistically of 'giving' editorial control to the people who actually finance it through their licence fees is an achievement in itself. Mike Fentiman pointed out the anomaly that the BBC Charter expressly forbids the BBC to give editorial control to anyone. More fundamentally though, the access mode of production implicitly challenges the ethos of 'professionalism' which has replaced 'public service' as the *raison d'être* of broadcasters. Professionalism defines broadcasting as an end in itself to be evaluated according to professional criteria; 'access' sees broadcasting as a means to an end, so a programme is evaluated according to criteria outside the television institution. Consequently the BBC has always used its allocatory control of finance and scheduling to ensure 'access' never

pollutes the rest of its output.

'Representative' access is the mode of production primarily adopted by Channel 4 for its 'access' programming. Programmes such as *Eleventh Hour* are produced by professional programme-makers who 'represent' different constituencies who have been misrepresented or excluded by the media. However the Channel has tried to set other models, such as that of the Television History Workshop, who set up a shopfront office for discussions with the populace of the car-manufacturing town of Cowley on their series *Making Cars*, and helps finance various workshops for more long-term projects.

All three modes of production are inevitably intensely problematic. The 'hands-on' model's thesis that accesses can only really control the production process if they have a level of audio-visual 'competence' is indisputable. However such an educational project is necessarily an extremely long term endeavour, while many potential accesses may want immediate access to a national network for an immediate political intervention; they may not have the inclination or time to become 'literate' first. There is also a residual purism in this approach which implicitly hopes that accesses, uncluttered by the 'noise' of technology and 'professionals', can speak 'directly' to the audience – whereas the text's meanings are also inevitably determined by the distribution system into which it is inserted, its relationship to other media texts and the audience's own construction of its meanings.

The contradictions of 'mediated access' are far more obvious. The BBC, assuming that professionalism is a neutral skill, sees no contradiction in professionals assisting accesses in 'having their say in their own way'. But in practice this is profoundly difficult. When the 'professionals' meet the 'amateurs' they bring with them the 'baggage' of their professionalisation and its assumptions of 'good and bad television'. These inevitably, if subtly, influence the final shape of the programme.³ The accesses are inserted into a broadcasting system in which 'their' programme is also a commodity

which has to be produced within an industrialised system of labour over which they can have no control. The advantages of institutional resources have to be offset with the dangers of the programme being 'professionalised' out of their control. While most accesses are relatively satisfied with the final programme it is perhaps not surprising that occasionally groups are bitterly disillusioned – 'we soon felt that we were helping them make *their* programme' (All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism).

The main danger of 'representative' access is that it sets up an alternative elite whose 'representativeness' is gradually eroded as they and their products are assimilated into the television system. This threat makes the establishment of structures of accountability and participation essential for this mode of production to retain its validity. Workshop agreements and the use of seed-money do partially resolve some of the contradictions present in the other modes; they avoid casualisation of labour, disseminate competence and skills, can remain accountable to their communities and can possess the possibility of access to network television. Yet Alan Fountain acknowledged that many questions remain: who gets access to the workshops? does desperately needed seed-money diminish autonomy and lead to a desire to 'professionalise' product for possible transmission? and on whose terms is the product transmitted?

The tensions between these three modes of 'access' animated the most fruitful discussion of the conference. The intervention of Swindon Viewpoint in screening their video about the making of an *Open Space* programme 'On The Road' in Swindon caused the latent tensions between the different participating constituencies to surface. 'On The Road' was a blend of access and vox pop; an Outside Broadcast unit was set up in Swindon's shopping centre and the residents given two minutes to 'stand on the soapbox' or perform in any way they liked. The Viewpoint video crosscut interviews from the producers announcing their intentions to give the people of Swindon 'access' and the dissatisfactions of some of the participants on the day, who felt their 'two minute Open Space' inadequate or people who had not bothered to contribute because they felt the access offered

³ See Carl Gardner (with Margaret Henry), 'Racism, Anti-racism and Access Television: the Making of Open Door', *Screen Education* no 31, Summer 1979, pp 69-79, for a critical account.

was either spurious or too meagre for their needs. The video successfully raised the contradictions in the mediated access mode where the 'need' for a 'professional product' was potentially at odds with the 'need' of the Swindon contributors for access. A remark from Mike Fentiman in an interview on the tape fully articulated this: 'if the experiment is successful we've got a show, if not we've got an experiment.'

Swindon Viewpoint's video was not specifically discussed but it effected a significant shift in the event's previously rather self-congratulatory trajectory. The final discussions revolved around several issues: the need for low-band material to be given access; whether access should be used as a right of reply (with the danger that it could be monopolised by well organised right wing groups who already have more than enough access to mainstream television); whether access to broadcast television is only a pressure valve for the oppressed to let off steam which distracts them from the central task of changing broadcasting structures or a Trojan horse for the future storming of the citadels of television;

whether the Left should become involved in access to cable television or concentrate on establishing alternative distribution systems using VHS cassettes, as is being done in Sheffield.

No conclusive consensus was reached on any of these issues. It would have been surprising if it had been, given both the current political situation and the organisational and discursive difficulties which the event had to contain. *Whose Telly Anyway?* was useful to the extent that it afforded a retrospective of the achievements of access TV. Those achievements are real: people and ideologies previously marginalised or misrepresented have been represented in their own terms on television; the mystique of professionalism has been rendered more problematic; the origination of programme material has diversified. That achievement is worth defending. But the mood of the event remained one of defensiveness and retrenchment. It may be 'our' telly really, but it's going to be 'theirs' for some time to come. For the moment 'access' is going to remain merely a blink in the continual gaze of television's eye.

PARAGRAPH

Publishes work on modern critical theory in its relation to literature, film, opera and the visual arts.

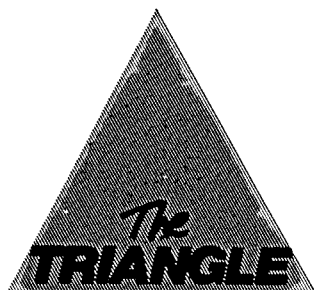
- | | | | |
|------|--------------|-------------|--|
| no.3 | contains | L.Hill | on Robbe-Grillet |
| | | F.Baker | on Barthes and Callas |
| | | T.Mathews | on Surrealist painting |
| | | J.Forrester | on Dostoevsky |
| no.4 | will contain | F.Baker | on Losey's <u>Don Giovanni</u> |
| | | R.Young | on Psychoanalytic criticism |
| | | A-M.Smith | on Nerval |
| | | M.Chinca | on the Fascination of images in H.von Morungen |

Appears twice a year in April and October. Separate issues £3.

Subscription for 2 issues £5.

Subscription manager: Jill Forbes, Dept. of European Studies,
Loughborough University of Technology,
Loughborough LE11 3TU.

The journal of the Modern Critical Theory Group



THE BOOKSHOP AT THE TRIANGLE

Aston University Arts Centre, Gosta Green, Birmingham B4 7ET

Books on Cinema, Television and Media Studies.

Please send to the bookshop at the above address for a free catalogue.

IMPLOSIVE CRITIQUES

A CONSIDERATION OF JEAN BAUDRILLARD'S 'IN THE SHADOW OF THE SILENT MAJORITIES'

BY PHILIP HAYWARD

The whole chaotic constellation of the social revolves around that spongy referent, that opaque but equally translucent reality, that nothingness: the masses. A statistical crystal ball, the masses are 'swirling with currents and flows', in the image of matter and the natural elements. So at least they are represented to us. They can be 'mesmerized', the social envelops them, like static electricity; but most of the time, precisely, they form an earth, that is, they absorb all the electricity of the social and political and neutralize it forever.¹

In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities, a collection of Jean Baudrillard's work recently published in English, sets out a number of broad assertions about the nature of contemporary western society and the role of the mass media within it. Baudrillard's work rejects any notion of the processes of the media taking place within a cohesive and coherent system, 'society', and consequently functions as an exterior critique of the loose consensus of British media theory (as typified by *Screen*, the work of the BFI Education Department etc...) which has accepted the notion of a cohesive society as a largely unproblematic concept. Given these

assumed social parameters, the concentration on elaborating semiotic analyses which typified much British media work in the 1970s, and the more recent emphases on gender, race or broader ideological representations drawing on these analytic developments, are clearly crucial emphases. However, through addressing himself to the basis of these assumptions of social context, Baudrillard's work serves to problematise and contextualise their subsequent elaboration.

It is the centrality of this examination of notions of society and 'the social'², which both separates Baudrillard's work from other (Marxist-derived) approaches to contemporary society and the role of the media, and serves to locate its specific ideological context. Since the events of 1968³ and the stimulation of ideological debate in its aftermath, there have been significant re-alignments and divergencies in Western Marxism and the broad Left in general. The most prominent new emphases have demonstrated a loss of conviction for the proletariat as the focus and agent of revolutionary change under advanced Western Capitalism. Instead there has been an increasing focus on the radical potential/crucial importance of such areas as women's oppression under patriarchy, the broad ecology issue (NB the recent alignment of Gorz with the Green Movement) or the nuclear issue⁴, and various combinations and emphases of these (e.g. the Greenham Women's campaign). There have also been attempts to confront this crisis in Marxism by a deeper and more rigorous critique of its bases, most notably through the work of Foucault. But while much recent British media criticism has tended to foreground the development of feminist-derived critiques and debates, the attractions of the Gramsci/Althusser

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1983, pp 1-2. (See also the subsequent collection of Baudrillard's work in translation, *Simulations*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1984.)

² For the purpose of this piece, 'the social' is taken to mean those agencies which attempt to socialise the mass.

³ i.e. the civil disturbances in Paris and the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.

⁴ See particularly the work of Touraine, et al, in *Anti-Nuclear Protest: the Opposition to Nuclear Energy in France*, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

formulations of hegemony and ideological state apparatuses to the largely Marxist-derived basis of Media Studies has tended to close off further consideration of the nature of social power relations and the role of the media. This has led to the insulation of a field of cultural debate usually marked by (and indeed criticised for) its fluidity of theory.

The exact nature of society and social existence has always constituted a (largely bypassed) problematic in Marxist analysis, due to the centrality of economic determination to the notion of historical materialism. The work of Gramsci, emphasising the broad function of culture in the maintenance of the dominant hegemony⁵, and Althusser (most notably via his concepts of the Repressive State Apparatuses and Ideological State Apparatuses⁶), has constituted a significant expansion in the understanding of the relation of culture and agencies of the social to dominant class power; but it is most notably through Foucault's work that a radically different and more complex notion of the location and operation of power in state and society has been advanced⁷. To Foucault, power relations in state and society are not subordinate extensions of an economic power system dominating and structuring an 'organic' society via institutions and practices. Rather, he emphasises the complex relations of social power as determining economic development and modes of production. From this derives the distinct nature of Foucault's historical approach of genealogy, which rejects the linear schema of Marxist and bourgeois history alike, in favour of one which acknowledges ruptures and dislocations, synchronous and asynchronous emergences; and concentrates on the 'minutiae' and effects of social institutions and practices.

The Masses and the Simulation of the Social

Baudrillard's work draws substantially from both the broad nature of Foucault's conception of the power relations of state and society, and his genealogical approach to history.⁸ His work, however, concentrates on the distinct nature of contemporary (Western) existence, an area Foucault has yet to engage with in any more than the tentative manner of his assertion that the 'modern period' 'began about 1790-1810 and lasted until 1950'⁹, and his various reflections on

specific contemporary issues in interviews etc.... 129 Baudrillard exercises no such caution, and asserts a radically distinct model for contemporary existence. This model draws upon that development of a disciplinary society (marked by its internal regulation and surveillance), which Foucault asserts as constituting the definitive aspect of the 'modern period', but transcends it. For Baudrillard, the development and proliferation of ever more sophisticated institutionalised practices, particularly those deriving from twentieth century technological developments (e.g. the electronic mass media) have pushed the mechanisms of the disciplinary society to an extreme where its originating purposes are increasingly distorted and undermined. Whereas for Foucault, a demographic consciousness of the Population as an autonomous social unit (not reducible to the family) was central to the 'modern' consciousness of the disciplinary society, Baudrillard characterises the very distinct formation of contemporary society as 'the mass'.

The essence of this formation is the complete absence/decay of any 'organic' social existence under the ever increasing weight of 'the social'. Here we might note that though Baudrillard evokes the notion of an 'organic' social, a concept Foucault never advances, it proves elusive in his analysis: he avoids confronting it, instead commenting of it in its absence, that its signifiers have 'only ever been muddled notions themselves'¹⁰. As will be apparent from this circularity, in contrast to Foucault's carefully measured considerations and style, Baudrillard's

⁵ See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith eds), London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.

⁶ See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy* (Ben Brewster trans), New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1971 pp 127-186.

⁷ See particularly Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Alan Sheridan trans), London, Allen and Lane, 1977 and *Power/Knowledge* (Colin Gordon ed), Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980.

⁸ See Jean Baudrillard, *Oublier Foucault*, Paris, Galilée, 1977 (forthcoming as *Forget Foucault*, New York Semiotext(e)).

⁹ 'Deuxieme entretien avec Raymond Bellour', *Les Lettres francaises* no 1187, June 15, 1967, pp 6-9.

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, op cit, p 5.

approach and language is often more akin to Derrida at his 'wildest'¹¹, demonstrating an admirable fidelity to his critique of scientific approaches as mere 'schemas of reason'. The result of this approach, however, is that we cannot (unproblematically) 'translate' Baudrillard's assertions into a conventional model of representation and discussion. Instead of utilising a linear model of argument, accumulating points to a conclusion, his polemic centres on the notion of the atrophied social, drawing in diverse ideological strands in the manner of his metaphor of the masses, a black hole – the originating contexts of these diverse strands not necessarily sharing any symmetry of origins. Consequently this analysis will centre on his concepts of contemporary society and those ideas most closely clustered to it (i.e. the mass media), rather than risk fragmenting into an essentially fruitless catalogue of points Baudrillard draws from.

In '... Or the End of the Social'¹², Baudrillard reflects upon the nature of the withdrawal of the ('organic') social from contemporary existence and flatly states, 'Here several hypotheses are possible'. He goes on to enumerate and discuss these without, however, demonstrating the desire to emphasise or privilege one hypothesis over another, or interrelate their elaborations in a unitary context. These hypotheses, though divergent, still serve a primary function: if the social doesn't exist in the present, what is the nature of those phenomena which manifest themselves as the social? Baudrillard explains the 'falsity' of these phenomena in terms of their being a simulation of that absent ('organic') social. He asserts the progressive institutionalisation of the disciplinary society throughout the twentieth century as producing the situation where it asserts and addresses itself to a social whose only existence is in the continual evocation and representation of it, and the non-rejection of its veracity by the de-socialised mass. It will be apparent that this notion of the simulation of the social shares a certain resemblance to that notion of the maintenance of the dominant hegemony originated by Gramsci and elaborated via the work of Althusser. But the principal difference may be characterised as the relative success and cohesion of each project. In the Gramsci-Althusser formulation, the (dominant) hegemony is a highly adaptive homeostatic system whose

enduring success necessitates careful theoretical work on possible counter-strategies. For Baudrillard, though, the simulation of the social is a highly problematic (and ultimately self-defeating) attempt to bridge and obscure that gap between the reality of the mass and the hypothetical actuality of the social.

It should be emphasised here that this notion of the mass is not comparable with the notion of mass-as-proletariat of classic early Marxist analysis. Rather it is a specifically contemporary notion of the mass as a majority population, which is neither actually subservient to a system of symbolic domination (e.g. serfdom) nor in a position either to exert or secure influential access to/power over that economic-ideological system of which it is the principal human constituent. It is the relation between the actuality of this mass and the society it is represented as which most succinctly summarises both Baudrillard's notion of the process of simulation and the entropy of social energy thus produced. He utilises this formation of the mass to examine that often evoked contemporary phenomenon 'the silent majority'. He advances it as that concept necessitated by the dominant ideology, in order to explain the apparent withdrawal of the majority population from participatory social existence, and identifies its intractable ambiguity as the result of its attempted signification (albeit in a moderated form) within a socio-logical discourse. Thus the term 'silent majorities' is effectively an 'imaginary referent', but as he goes on to elaborate:

*That the silent majority (or the masses) is an imaginary referent does not mean that they don't exist. It means that their representation is no longer possible. The masses are no longer a referent because they no longer belong to the order of representation.*¹³

Baudrillard sees their withdrawal from orders of representation as a result of their intrinsic (precluding) alienation, a loss of any collective

¹¹ See, for instance, Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (Barbara Harlow trans), Chicago University Press, 1979.

¹² Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, op cit, p 70.

¹³ *ibid*, p 20.

social consciousness. This has the necessary effect that:

*They don't express themselves, they are surveyed. They don't reflect upon themselves, they are tested.*¹⁴

And it is precisely this *absence* of self-expression which necessitates the production of a representation, a representation which functions to recoup the silent majorities into that expressive system the theoretical ideal of democracy represents.

The Media: Decoding and Spectacle

The project of the simulation of the social is fundamentally one of representation, or more precisely of maintenance (and therefore credibility) of representation. Given the nature of this project as specific to contemporary Western existence, the role of the electronic mass media can be seen to be of major significance. This is not to assert that the project of the simulation of the social is reducible to mass media operation, but rather that the media embody the function of representation, and are the specific product of a contemporary consumerist technological society. This might be described as the prime context and effect of media operation, but there is also its overt function on a 'secondary' level. As outlined in the previous section, contemporarily dominant political classes and institutions (e.g. broadcasting corporations) perform two interdependent functions: one is the maintenance of the simulated social, which is both their heritage and the only grounds for their internal and external credibility; the second, operating in the space generated by the simulation of the social, is the political function, the apparent exercise of 'social' and economic power over the masses. Though interdependent, that continual assertion of the simulated social the political must necessarily embody and promote, also provides it with its dominant and insoluble problematic. All political and socio-economic programmes applied by it to the (assumed) social are necessarily inadequate and of marginal effect, since they are conceived of in relation to a (theoretical) social model, but applied to a non-

social (actuality), the mass.

Baudrillard sees this schism as necessarily generative of a process by which the ambiguities and divergencies of society-as-conceived, and mass-as-existing, are continually glossed over/obscured by their displaced representation within a conventional ('micro-') political framework. It is within this function that the media operate on a 'secondary' level of representation. Both levels, however, necessitate an underlying aesthetic which might be characterised as the unproblematic acceptance of transparency of form, related to, and being productive of, the facility of an 'undistorted' representation of reality via the media. To this production aesthetic we can add the corollary of the concept of, and reference to, its audience as a diverse but homogeneous social unit (e.g. 'the nation'), engaging with its output in a direct and unnegotiated manner. For Baudrillard then, the media (simultaneously) embody the function of the simulated social, and work within, and are reflective of, the political.

There is a substantial divergence of political strategy between the emphases of Baudrillard's analysis and those critical strategies which have typified that tradition of Media Studies which has become established (at least in Britain) since the 1960s. Whereas Baudrillard takes the workings of the political and its reflection via the media as 'given', and instead centres on the project of the simulation of the social as the crucial focus of analysis for a major revolution of consciousness and society in the long term, more orthodox Media Studies have centred on the 'immediate' effect of ideology and ideological representation on lived experience. It should be emphasised that Baudrillard (like Foucault) does not deny the reality or importance of this, but rather sees analysis, policy and action within unchallenged and assumed parameters as limited and ultimately insufficient. Baudrillard's analysis of media function and operation does not reject or attempt to demolish those areas which focus on how dominant ideology is reinforced and constituted by representation; nor does it deny the significance of narrative/genre/shot analyses, etc. . . . Rather, it seeks to contextualise them by offering an alternative formation of how media products and channels relate to that mass to which they broadcast.

Referring to such theoretical elaborations of the sender-transmission-receiver model as the

¹⁴ *ibid.*

*Microgroups and individuals, far from taking their cue from a uniform and imposed decoding, decode messages in their own way*¹⁵

Baudrillard goes on to emphasise his principal formation:

*But this is still the feat of groups traditionally structured by identity and significance. ... in the case of the media, traditional resistance consists of reinterpreting messages according to the group's own code and for its own ends. The masses, on the contrary, accept everything and redirect everything en bloc into the spectacular, without requiring any other code, without requiring any meaning. ...*¹⁶

While not denying the underlying basis of media production as the manufacture of encoded products ('texts'), which are transmitted and thus their 'meanings' (both denotative and connotative) diffused/absorbed and/or refracted among their audience, Baudrillard sees the dislocation of symmetry between the media as an agency of 'the social', and the masses as withdrawn and alienated from it, as effectively overwhelming the communication function of the media. Withdrawn from dominant orders of social, political and economic 'logic', increasingly involved in a minimal ('phantom') democratic participation, and lacking a collective identity, the masses (necessarily) cannot relate symmetrically to media output. Instead of engaging with the media's processes of signification, they embrace the media, fascinated by the free slide of its signifiers. Privileging this aspect, they do not transform meaning to non-sense, but rather displace it to an 'indeterminate sphere'. Their preoccupation is with the formal manifestation of media production, and as Baudrillard explicitly acknowledges, the spectre of McLuhan returns, and the medium is (once again) asserted as the message.

The progressive dislocation of the simulated social and the masses, and the masses' redirection of media signification into spectacle, produces a necessary irony. As the media increasingly strives to inform and represent the mass, it meets with ever-decreasing success, the withdrawal of the masses becomes more complete. The silence of the masses grows and, immune to the appeals of socio-political logic, becomes increasingly ominous:

*The strategy of power has long seemed founded on the apathy of the masses. The more passive they were, the more secure it was. But this logic is only true of the bureaucratic and centralist phase of power. And it is this which today turns against it: the inertia it has fostered becomes the sign of its own death. That is why it seeks to reverse its strategies: from passivity to participation, from silence to speech. But it is too late.*¹⁷

With the proliferation of media channels, programmes and 'representative' devices such as polls, interviews, phone-ins, etc, instead of the increase in 'meaning' and 'effect' the media envisage and assert, there is, rather, a devaluation. The greater the proliferation of channels and formal devices, the greater the emphasis is on these as manifestations of their form. The output of the mass media can be analogised as a cacophony which increases in a direct inverse relation to the silence of the masses. Instead of the media infiltrating and structuring the masses, they bombard it with 'stimuli, messages and signs'¹⁸, but are increasingly aware that the inertia of the masses absorbs and neutralises their output. The result is the 'mania' for statistical survey and analysis, and the production of simulated models through which the masses enter into the dominant order of representation; and increasingly, in desperation, the attempted

*... prediction by resonance, the effects of forecasting and of an illusory mass outlook: 'The French people think... The majority of German disapprove... All England thrilled to the birth of the Prince... etc'—a mirror held out for an ever blind, ever absent recognition.*¹⁹

Retrievals

As stated earlier, Baudrillard's style and approach do not easily 'translate' into the traditional linear model of academic argument. Consequently, the main body of this piece represents more an assembly of complementary conceptual formations than a drive of theoretical

¹⁵ *ibid*, p 42.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p 43.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p 23.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 21.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p 24.

argument to a conclusion. In addition, the emphasis has been on the challenges Baudrillard's work offers to the underlying assumptions of what I characterise as the loose 'orthodoxy' of contemporary Media Studies, rather than an attempt at a comprehensive exposition of the total implications and challenges of his work (i.e. for established concepts of society, culture and the media). Indeed, the nature and structure of his work is such that it cannot easily be contained and focused within one specific area – it continually 'refers out' and often advances multiple and/or divergent hypotheses. Baudrillard's work, and specifically here, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, cannot therefore be subject to a definitive interpretation (if indeed any text can) – there is no 'correct' reading to be adduced and therefore no 'Baudrillardian' orthodoxy to be established.

Of course, this very approach, the rejection of conventional modes of argument, combined with the force of his polemic, provokes cultural xenophobia and inevitably invites a complementary rejection from those established theoretical standpoints he counters. It is Baudrillard's specific assertions about the nature of society and the masses which offer themselves most tantalisingly to negative critique. They represent extreme diagnoses (often couched in elusive metaphor) of the extreme tendencies and drift of contemporary society, with the unstated referent of America always present as a model. We can easily assert that there *is* some sociality in human interaction, there *is* some degree of political participation, there *is* some degree of active decoding of media output. But it is nevertheless difficult not to feel that Baudrillard's work necessitates a substantial reconsideration (at least) of underlying notions of the social context of media operation, particularly since the social bases he attacks are not an area of tightly formulated and argued theoretical standpoints, but rather an area of largely veiled assumptions. As Barry Smart²⁰ points out, the lack of development of concepts of the social in Marxist theory affords Foucault's critique an undeniable purchase; the similar absence of development in Media Studies affords Baudrillard's work a similar 'legitimacy' of consideration.

It is clearly crucial for any rigorous theoretical analysis to obtain the greatest possible

understanding of how ideology is promoted and 'manufactured' in cultural production, and close textual analysis of cultural products is clearly a significant aspect of this project. The influence of Lacanian psychoanalysis has complemented this by contributing to the formulation of how the viewer/reader is structured into the text and the nature of the pleasure of identification. But these approaches are representative of, or referential to, the classic notion of the subject immersed in the (cinematic) text, an emphasis which both bypasses less active scanning responses, and also the very different viewing response television requires as a broadcast channel. (Throughout this piece I have not attempted to reduce Baudrillard's notion of media production to television, since it is the broad media field he refers to, though in many ways television is the exemplary example.)

The valuable emphasis of Baudrillard's work is that it signifies the necessity of a broad conceptualisation, a 'philosophy' of communications, as the basis of the study of media production and reception. This emphasis is all the more important for the development of Media Studies in Britain, since while the late '70s and early '80s have seen the levelling off of Film Studies as a curriculum growth area (at least at the Secondary/Further Education level)²¹, Communications Studies have become the one area of remaining and potential growth (due to the Manpower Services Commission Life Skills emphasis, among other factors). Since, as Gillian Skirrow has forcefully argued²², Communication Studies, as presently constituted, has no coherent/unitary subject discipline, it presents itself as the prime 'open space' for the strategic development in the late '80s of those progressive approaches which Media/Film Studies have pioneered for the last twenty years, but which are now displaying ominous signs of atrophying into a formalist orthodoxy.

My thanks to Julia Knight for her help and advice on this article.

²⁰ Barry Smart, *Foucault, Marxism, Critique*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, pp 119-22.

²¹ See David Lusted, 'Media Education and the Secondary/FE Curriculum' in *Media Education Conference 1981: A Report*, London, BFI Education, 1981.

²² i.e. in her address to the SEFT/BFI Media Education Conference at the University of London Institute of Education, March 4, 1983.

EDUCATING ADULTS...

A DOSSIER ON FILM AND TELEVISION STUDIES

INTRODUCED BY CHRISTINE GERAGHTY

Adult Education, despite the very wide range of courses offered by education authorities such as Inner London's and the variety of other institutions involved, still somehow smacks of draughty halls, uncooperative caretakers and keep-fit classes. And yet, courses for adults still offer a way into film and TV study for many whose formal education did not acknowledge such media. SEFT itself is centrally involved in such a project every time it puts on a day school or weekend event. In addition, film and video are increasingly used as an attraction for events whose main purpose is not 'screen education' – a video on sexual harassment, perhaps, to start off an after-work discussion among women trade unionists, *Rosie the Riveter* to finish off a day school on women at work, *Burning an Illusion* at an anti-racist social. It is easy for those not involved in adult education to ignore its range and importance and for those who are to get bogged down in the (crucial) details of film hire and projection facilities. The following four articles were requested from people who work in the field in different places and with different responsibilities. They are not meant to give definitive accounts of their own institutions or to provide model courses. Nor are they intended to be competing versions of what is desirable or possible. I hope instead that they indicate a range of possibilities – two-hour weekly evening classes, daytime courses, weekend and day schools, video making, certificate work – and initiate debate on a neglected area.

It is clear that education for adults involves literally negotiating with a range of institutions – universities, education authorities, the Workers' Education Association, the Home Office, etc –

although it is noticeable that the British Film Institute's Education Department is mentioned by every contributor. Different institutional bases will affect the type of courses offered but these articles raise a number of common issues which could be explored further. There is the question of whether the purpose of the course is to teach film (or, more broadly, media) study or whether film is being used as part of a more general course on feminism, for instance, or trade unionism. Even within film courses, the BFI/University of London courses, for example, take on issues of class and feminism within a concept-based film study course, while the Bradford 'Women and Film: Makers and Making' course is specifically aimed at exploring the possibilities of a feminist cinema. While a study of film inevitably involves questions of representation, ideology and politics, different strategies are used to set up and teach different types of courses. Teaching strategies for long term and short courses need to be approached differently. Roy Stafford, in discussing the three or four year Extra Mural course in London, emphasises the written work and exam structure available to students; Peter Packer at the Tyneside Cinema rightly notes that day schools attract a different constituency. Similarly, while many courses deal only with viewing/film theory, Janey Walklin and Peter Packer offer comments on the role of practical video work in Adult Education.

Adult Education, in the formal sense, has always been run on a comparative shoestring and finance will be a growing problem for any course relying, one way or another, on public money. Keith Skinner describes how the film course at

Maidstone Prison collapsed when the funds ran out and the financial pressure on the University of London Department of Extra-Mural Studies is beginning to be strongly felt. Linked with these problems are the difficulties over copyright, the cost of film hire (particularly from 'art film' distributors), access to video equipment, the reproduction of accompanying written material, the battle for a proper room in which to show the films (the allocation of the school canteen rather than the physics lab can be a major victory!). All these factors determine the kind of course that can – and in Keith Skinner's case sadly can't – be offered. Film courses are more expensive to run than most Adult Education classes and any tutor planning a course now has to ask whether a film is available and affordable before deciding whether it is essential.

The following articles give an indication of the range of work carried out in the Adult Education sector and the enthusiastic response it generates. It seems crucial to hold on to what is currently happening and to explore the problems raised by these and other examples. Philip Simpson, in his article on a series of discussions at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, noted the importance of 'changing the critical practices of the audience'.¹ Adult Education is an important part of that process. SEFT itself could offer a useful forum, through workshops and day schools perhaps, for a discussion of the strategies and practices best deployed in film and video education for adults.

¹ 'Talking Heads', *Screen*, March-April 1984, vol 25 no 2, p 82.

... AT LONDON UNIVERSITY

ROY STAFFORD REVIEWS THE INFLUENTIAL EXTRA-MURAL COURSE

The London University film study courses are well established and have been, perhaps, the single most important source of instruction in film study available to date in the U.K.

With this striking claim, Richard Collins introduced a short article on the British Film Institute/London University Extra-Mural Certificate in Film Study in 1972.¹ In the past twelve years there have been major changes both in British film culture and in the education system at all levels. In September 1984, teaching will begin on a new second year course of the Extra-Mural Certificate and in the following September a new third year will be offered. This will complete a major revision of the Certificate/Diploma Courses which began in the late 1970s. The aim of this article is to place the Extra-Mural Courses in the general context of film studies teaching and to raise some general issues about the utility of the courses in relation to Adult Education and the development of British film culture.²

The structure of the Certificate/Diploma Courses in 1985/6 will be as follows:

Year 1: Introduction to Cinema – A general introduction to Film Study and to some of the important debates.

Year 2: Critical Concepts – a) Narrative/Textual Production; b) Genre: Reading and Meaning Production.

Year 3: Critical Debates – Questions of Realism/Pleasure/Representation. Successful completion of these three years, on the basis of attendance, coursework and yearly examination will lead to a Certificate in Film Study. Students may then progress to a fourth year for the Diploma. The fourth year is a taught course where students can develop the theoretical work of the first three years and apply it to a special study.

Each year course comprises 24 two-hourly evening meetings. The provision of courses represents a pyramid with a range of first year classes, both at the British Film Institute and at out-centres, but only one fourth year class. The provision clearly reflects demand, with first year classes often oversubscribed, but only 20 to 30 per cent of students wishing to enter for the examination. Although exam entry is not a prerequisite for enrolment on second and third year courses, and a number of non-exam students follow the whole course, it does act as a self-selection process. In a climate of education cuts the drop in numbers is disturbing and one factor in the revision of second and third year courses has been an attempt to make the progression from the first year more easily identifiable and understandable. To this end, the previous second year course on 'Anti-Realist Theory and Practice' has been effectively rethought and spread across years two and three. It is not the intention in this general article to analyse the debate which preceded this decision, but it would be useful if a future article were to take up the debate about teaching 'realism'.³

The four years of the Certificate/Diploma represent the central provision of Film Study courses by London University Extra-Mural Department in conjunction with the BFI, but there are important off-shoots from the 24-week courses. One is the twelve-week course offered at the BFI in the summer term, which offers the

¹ Felicity Grant, 'Certificate in Film Study', *Screen Education* no 5, Winter 1972/3, pp 24-31.

² It should be noted that the courses refer specifically to film. Although some reference may be made to television, TV/Media Studies are offered in a separate series of Extra-Mural Courses.

³ A particularly useful article in this respect is Christine Gledhill, 'Whose Choice? Film and Abortion', *Screen Education* no 24, Autumn 1977, pp 35-45. The only article I am aware of which analyses a specific aspect of the Extra-Mural Course is Pam Cook, 'Teaching Avant-Garde Film', *Screen Education* no 32/33, Autumn/Winter 1979/80, pp 83-97.

chance to develop work in particular areas for which there may not be space in the 24-week courses and the opportunity to screen rare material, often from the National Film Archive. Together with the pioneering MA course at the Polytechnic of Central London, some of the credit for the development of interest in the British cinema and the 'rediscovery' of British films of the 1940s and 1950s could be attributed to work on the Extra-Mural Courses.⁴ The short course allows a meeting of Extra-Mural tutors with students from all years (and anyone else who can withstand the rush to enrol in early April). This is also partly the function of a weekend school held for Extra-Mural students in January/ February. This practice dates back from the early days of the course⁵ and has been successfully revived in the last two years. Additionally, first year tutors have run study weekends for their students—an indication of growing student enthusiasm.

Since their start in the late 50s, these courses have undoubtedly included a broad mix of students—as is the case in most areas of Adult Education—but changes in other educational provision, especially in Higher Education, are likely to have influenced the composition of Extra-Mural classes. Students can be roughly separated into three groups: a) education workers, mostly teachers but also researchers, media resources officers, librarians, etc; b) workers in the entertainment industry and in the public sector arts community; and c) students who enrol for a film study course primarily on the basis of a leisure interest in cinema. They are likely to be graduates, usually from an arts background, and aged between 20 and 40. In the last ten years it is probably the case that the number of students in group (a) has reduced in proportion while numbers in the other two groups have grown. There are some obvious reasons for this—primarily the growth of courses,

both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, in Higher Education which are wholly or partly concerned with Film Study and in particular those courses which confer recognised qualifications for teaching Film Studies. Other factors might be seen to have led to an expansion in numbers in the other two groups. There is undoubtedly a market for evening-class provision for students with a leisure interest in a 'serious' study of cinema. Some of this interest has derived from attachment to the growth of a new film culture which has developed around the reviewing practices of magazines such as *Time Out* and, more recently, *City Limits* and music papers like *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker*. Another stimulus would be the relative growth in the number of new art cinemas such as those recently opened in London by Mainline and Artificial Eye⁷, in the face of the decline of commercial cinemas. A further factor might be the increased television interest in the cinema with the advent of Channel 4 and the possibility (only a possibility) of wider access to film texts through video hire. A different set of factors may relate to an increased awareness of the place of film in relation to struggles over representation. Students are certainly drawn to classes from an initial involvement in feminism or, perhaps less frequently, anti-racism. Others may be drawn to a film study class from an involvement with more traditional political issues, perhaps encountering arguments about mediation through contact with work such as that of the Glasgow Media Group. But it is apparent that any pair of tutors meeting an Extra-Mural class for the first time will encounter a heterogeneous group with a range of different specific interests in film, different political positions and quite possibly different educational experiences, despite equivalent attainments.

Given the changing nature of the student body on the Extra-Mural courses it is worth considering whether or not there has been a concomitant change in the aims of the courses. If there has been a general shift towards an adult education enrolment (i.e. away from a vocational group of putative Film Studies teachers), then this suggests a need for a shift of emphasis and a development of different teaching methods. According to the London University Scheme of Study, the purpose of the course is to 'enable students to undertake continuous and systematic

⁴ e.g. Gainsborough Melodrama Season at the NFT and the accompanying *Gainsborough Melodrama*, BFI Dossier 18, London, British Film Institute, 1982, and the BFI 1983 Summer School on 'National Fictions'.

⁵ See Felicity Grant, *op cit*.

⁶ e.g. courses at the Polytechnic of Central London, Bulmershe College, London University Institute of Education, etc.

⁷ e.g. Screen on Baker St, Lumière, Chelsea, etc.

study at a high level in film'. If students are to succeed in this purpose, it is clear that the first, introductory year is crucial. The fall-off in enrolments for subsequent years would tend to suggest that either a large number of students are not prepared to commit themselves to such a systematic study or that the shift from introductory to more advanced work has not been sufficiently considered. Introducing students to Film Study is no easy task, especially when the students concerned are adults often with a successful history of study in a particular subject discipline. As John Ellis has pointed out⁸, Film Studies demands from students a wide range of attention: an awareness of technology as well as aesthetics, of collective labour (both film producers and film audiences), of a history of critical practices, of ideology, etc. It brings together traditional subject disciplines and at the same time creates disruption within them. Students from an English Literature background are confronted with technology and industry, those from Sociology are confronted with textual analysis.

There would seem to be four broad aims for the Extra-Mural Courses (and indeed any course for adult study as opposed to the provision of exhibition facilities). The first is to enable students to develop the ability to talk and write about individual films in both aesthetic and industrial terms – in other words to engage in practical criticism. This often proves much more difficult than students (and tutors) expect, but it is essential that students gain confidence in discussing individual films before they attempt a more general approach. The second aim is to introduce students to a range of critical concepts and debates and to encourage a collective application of theory to selected film texts. This is often seen by students as frustrating the first aim. Where films are screened as material for discussion around particular critical debates, the space for practical criticism is effectively limited – students may wish to discuss the film, not the critical approach. The third aim is to enable students to develop an awareness of the process of history in cinema, both in terms of a history of production and consumption and a history of critical work. This is an important aspect of the

course and one which can easily be overlooked in the concentration upon contemporary critical debates. The London Extra-Mural evening-class offers a rare opportunity to view silent films and documentaries from the '30s and '40s. Students need to build up a background of viewing in order to develop a perspective on contemporary film texts. The fourth aim is to enable students to confront a range of political and ideological issues in relation to film and its wider context in society. In terms of the shift within the student body this has proved to be the source of a range of problems, given the 'commonsense' assumptions initially held by students, the strongly held political views of some students and the clear origination of most recent film theory in left politics.

Some of the specific problems of teaching evening-classes must be outlined before a proper discussion of appropriate teaching methods can take place. The single most constraining factor is lack of time. In an average year's course tutors will expect to screen something like eight feature-length films, effectively consuming a third of the teaching time available. During the remainder of the time, extract or short material will probably consume the equivalent of another four sessions leaving half the course time or less for direct class contact between tutors and students. Such a weight of screening is essential for textual analysis and for work on genre, questions of authorship, etc. and is doubly necessary given the sometimes very limited range of viewing which many students bring to the course. However, it does present major problems, not least because the most appropriate teaching methods are also likely to be time-consuming. Throughout the history of the course, tutors have tried to make use of public screenings and extra screenings outside class time, but the solution is not likely to be found until wider access to inexpensive video libraries makes critical reading of film texts as commonplace as critical reading of novels. (Evening-class literature students would not expect whole sessions to be devoted to the collective reading of novels.)

Availability of prints for screening can be a problem. There is a particular difficulty in relation to extracts since the current stock is not being replenished and titles are lost through wear and tear and expiry of rights. As the 16mm

⁸ John Ellis, 'Film in Higher Education', *Screen Education* no 38, Spring 1981, pp 32-40.

market contracts, it may prove difficult to select appropriate titles for those courses run away from the BFI. Fortunately, tutors do have access at the BFI centres to 35mm facilities and to the viewing copies of stock from the National Film Archive. The whole question of screenings on the courses is obviously very much concerned with cost and, at a time when education cuts are having a very damaging effect on the resources of the Extra-Mural Department, there is pressure on tutors to plan courses at minimum cost and to force up fees to an 'economic' level. It would be a tragedy if the level of fees were to act as a barrier to potential students. An additional resource problem is beginning to emerge with written material, as the University is unable to update adequately the 'book-box', the mini-library available to each class. Access to the BFI Library for Extra-Mural students has gone some way to alleviate this problem, but students' limited exposure to critical texts puts a greater burden on the tutors, both in the preparation of materials and in class exposition.

The logistical and resource problems outlined here must be seen alongside the pedagogic problems of running an ambitious course for both examination and non-examination students. The exams are neither compulsory nor vocational and students who enter for them generally do so to give themselves the impetus to write rather than in a competitive spirit. Nevertheless, their very existence imposes certain responsibilities on the tutors. The University requirements for certification of the courses are relatively straightforward. Students are required to attend 18 out of the 24 meetings, to submit approximately 12,000 words in written work and to pass the 'exam' (one essay written over the period of a month) at the end of each year. This calls for a high level of commitment from students who may have full-time jobs not related to the area of study. Tutors are able to exercise a large degree of discretion in helping students to organise their work, but even so it is a daunting prospect, especially in the first year when writing about film is unknown territory and in the second year when critical texts become more complex and challenging.

The final problems for the class are the expectations of both students and tutors and the concepts of learning which they apply to the sessions. Many students see the role of the tutor

as that of expert and source of correct 'answers' to the critical questions which are raised. Many tutors, on the other hand, see themselves as facilitators of learning. A particular example of this misconception of aims occurred on the recent weekend school on 'Remakes'. One of the main aims of the school was to study two different versions of the same original property as a means of developing students' ability to analyse narrative. This appeared to work very well and discussion groups produced skilled and interesting readings of the two films concerned and raised a whole series of questions about narrative. Yet several students felt that what they had been engaged in did not constitute 'work' and in the plenary session it was evident that some students felt frustrated that the 'issue' – why did Hollywood undertake remakes? – had not been settled with a definitive statement. It should be said that it was a minority of students who felt that way about the weekend and in general the tutors were pleased with the overall success of the school, which was predicated on the kind of pedagogic practice which emphasises small group work and structured discussion at the expense of formal lectures.

Extra-Mural course tutors usually work in pairs, ideally male and female together. This double staffing is important for a number of reasons. It clearly lessens the burden of preparation and marking, it gives the students access to a wider range of tutor response and potentially a wider range of teaching methods. The official title of the Extra-Mural Class is 'University Extension Course' and there is a danger that the appropriate teaching method might be seen as simply an extension of Higher Education teaching practices with its emphasis on the formal lecture as well as tutorial work. Given the time constraints and the amount of work to be covered it is certainly the most economical method. Courses could be, and have been, organised on the basis of formal lecture (illustrated by extracts), screening with accompanied reading and in the third week a seminar. Essay questions are then set on the three week block and the second tutor repeats the process for the next area of work. This crude model has an appealing simplicity but two main criticisms can be levelled against it. First, it is teacher-centred and takes little account of the kind of learning problems associated with

evening-class groups; second, it allows little space for any challenge to the direction of the work of the class. Pam Cook takes up this issue when she describes the main models of teaching practice as she sees them.⁹ In the three dominant, teacher-centred, models which she cites, the teacher acts on the accepted body of knowledge in order to *re-present* it to students for their consumption; *mediate* it for students for easier assimilation; and *provoke* students to think, analyse and produce coherent arguments. She goes on to propose a fourth model, the *argumentative* or *discursive*, 'in which the notion of an autonomous, coherent area of work... is broken down to allow for productive conflict between different areas of work. This would also involve a different relationship between teacher and student in which the positions of each would be identified and open to criticism, and the breaking down of discrete subject categories to include inter-disciplinary work.'¹⁰ In Pam Cook's experience this model is very rarely found in practice and yet it seems to be the ideal model for Film Studies teaching as outlined by John Ellis¹¹ and ought to be an essential part of teaching practice on the Extra-Mural Course.

I would like to suggest a number of modifications to the dominant lecture/seminar model which are designed to make teaching more student-centred, to develop the confidence to work with the material and the other group members and to offer more space for students to challenge the coherence of the subject. It will always be necessary for tutors to make presentations, but these should not be too long and can be accompanied by a written outline of the argument – it seems to me unproductive for evening-class students to make notes during a long lecture. More time should be devoted to structured discussion. There is much to be gained, especially early in the course, by students preparing for larger group discussions by first working in pairs or groups of three or four, possibly with carefully designed worksheets. With two tutors available, formal seminars can be partly organised in two groups – on first year courses where enrolment often numbers above

30, large group discussions are rarely effective. Unfortunately, accommodation problems might make these arrangements difficult to implement, but the benefit can be substantial – a larger number of students confident of their own contribution and their progress. This increased motivation will lead these students more easily into written work, which in a course with such limited class contact is essential if students are to expand and work on their own ideas. Helping students to organise written work is an important role for tutors. Some will move quickly into producing well-crafted, substantial essays. Others, for whom essay writing is a long-forgotten or never properly learned skill, will need to begin with modest offerings and develop slowly. Some tutors have recognised this important problem by attempting to create space on the course for tutorials. Creating any space on these courses is difficult, especially when syllabuses and film orders have to be submitted several months before tutors meet a class for the first time. But it is possible to retain some flexibility by scheduling one or two sessions at the end of a block of work where attention can shift more directly to students' concerns, where individual students or groups of students can organise sessions in which they present work which either builds on the previous sessions or else offers a critique of what has been done. In my experience these are potentially very useful activities and can open up the possibilities of the course for many students while at the same time emphasising the collective nature of the work of the group.

These suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of teaching and learning are largely based on recognising the needs and the worth of the students. Despite all the problems detailed above, teaching in Adult Education can be a very satisfying activity and a large part of the satisfaction derives from the enthusiasm and commitment of adult students. The success of these courses is to be found not only in the quality of the work produced, but also in the quality of informal discourse in the pub following the evening-class and in the participation of evening-class students in events outside the normal class meetings. While I have argued the need to rethink teaching strategies on these courses, I would not like to suggest that current course tutors or the institutions are insensitive to students. On the contrary, the team

⁹ Pam Cook, *op cit.*

¹⁰ *ibid*, p 90.

¹¹ John Ellis, *op cit.*

of tutors meets at intervals to review the courses and I believe there is a growing awareness of the need for, and commitment to, more effective teaching and learning. Both the University Extra-Mural Department and BFI Education are supportive of new ideas and as helpful with resources as their funds will allow. The revisions to the Scheme of Study have been the result of working parties of tutors and as such have reflected a concern with many of the problems outlined above.

BFI Education organised a one day seminar on Film and Television Studies in Adult Education in 1981 and pedagogy was evidently a central concern for many of the participants. The London Extra-Mural Course represents the most structured and evolved provision of Film Study in Adult Education, but many of the issues

raised in this article will find an echo in Workers' Educational Association Centres, Adult Education Institutes and Community Arts Centres throughout the country. In the last three years Adult Education has suffered very badly from cuts in spending by a whole range of funding bodies and in some parts of the country its very existence is threatened. Yet the demand for it has never been greater and Film and Television Studies stands every chance of attracting a wide range of adult students if classes can be funded. One of the most important functions of SEFT in its new campaigning role must be to fight for those funds and if proper use is to be made of any funding so won, the Society must also concern itself with the development of effective teaching and learning strategies for Media Studies in Adult Education.

... AT TYNESIDE CINEMA

PETER PACKER CONSIDERS EXHIBITION AS EDUCATION

Cinemas show films; the public pays to watch them. Tyneside Cinema opposes this process of consumption and closure and it is from this position that its policies and practices spring. Tyneside Cinema as a whole attempts to be, literally and theoretically, a site where, through the medium of film – and increasingly television and video – the social production of meaning is both activated (through the engagement of its audience-producers) and framed (by programming structures, activities and events). Some of these activities are conventionally, though not unproblematically, labelled ‘educational’.

The physical site and location rejects closure as ‘formal educational institution’ or ‘inaccessible Art sanctuary’. On a busy street, in the heart of the City, with coffee-shop and bookshop in among its auditoria and study facilities, where the cinema of Central America rubs shoulders with *Doctor Who*, pre-existing categories are persistently challenged and new connections made.

Yet while these connections are by no means casual, or simply the result of chance, it is understood that they will emerge from specific circumstances and be suited to particular times, social, educational, or cultural contexts. The work is a project which is experimental and constantly changing. That this project is never realised or manifested complete derives from its dynamic nature. Recognising the need to undermine the ever re-forming forces of recuperation, Tyneside Cinema constantly alters its strategy of resistance. It also takes account of the evolving demands which new levels of consciousness, in part the result of its own work, produce.

Tyneside Cinema, then, works, not merely *against* elements of cultural, social, political closure but *with* developing individual and group awareness. It deliberately operates at a number of different levels of apprehension simultaneously.

Some areas of operation continue to attract audiences at a relatively low level of consciousness while others have grown and developed (either as a result of the Cinema’s own activities or the needs of specific target groups); other provision is inserted strategically, as part of the active ‘framing’ policy of the Cinema, as specific occasions demand.

This policy of active intervention in the process of meaning-making is both generally necessary and specifically productive. Given the lack, in schools today and certainly for the adult population, of any previous training even in basic image analysis, it is recognised that all readings of film texts need support and direction. Broader inter-textual connections and the analysis of issues occur through specific work: courses, day schools, etc, where there is a conscious and active engagement with textual, social and cultural problems. Tyneside Cinema not merely acknowledges the impossibility of being a ‘neutral’ interpreter but views its role as politically and socially active. It does not simply alert people to unconscious (or semi-conscious) referential systems but attempts to weaken and break those which are reactionary and repressive.

Such a site and project – an environment where meaning-making consciously takes place, where this process is actively and progressively structured and where specific subjects or topics are productively targeted – clearly demand the conjunction of multivarious strands. From posters to monographs, casual book enquiries to a twenty-week course, pop videos to *Napoleon*: this is the weave of Tyneside Cinema’s work.

This preamble, though, should not be taken to imply that we have found the ‘answer’. We have only posed the question. Solutions to the problems of finance and facilities, of long-term and immediate strategy, above all of whether what you do actually does what you believe it should, remain elusive. In this article I shall

survey the Cinema's work with adults, indicate areas of difficulty and outline my current thinking on present and future planning. Since I was only appointed to the Cinema in June 1983 as its first full-time Education Officer (with a brief which also includes work with children, schools and teachers) my thoughts about the priorities for Adult Education and how the facilities of this Cinema can best be used to meet them are still developing. I hope, though, that both the type of work I outline and the problems that have been encountered will be of interest to those in similar areas of work and I would be most interested to learn from others how they tackle shared difficulties and what other 'solutions' they have found.

There have been adult classes at the Cinema since 1979. Tutors are paid either by the University of Newcastle's Adult Education Department or by the Workers' Educational Association, the cost of film/video hire being largely met by the British Film Institute's Education Department with the facilities, organisation and publicity provided by the Cinema itself. Currently there are two evening classes – 'Understanding Film' and 'They Lived by Night' (*films noirs* and their more recent relations) – which are for two hours each over some twenty weeks and had initial enrolments of between 25 to 30 adults. Another similarly funded series of six Saturday day schools, 'Nothing Like The Book', examines related pairs of novels and films. Enrolment varies, but a core of twelve to fifteen adults have attended each session this year.

Such courses, conventional in their structure, content and appeal, pose a number of problems for the Cinema. This certainly does not reflect unfavourably on individual tutors, who are also conscious of these questions and the lively attendance and participation indicates that much productive work is achieved. Indeed some of the difficulties are not specific to film study, but arise partly from the institutional nature of Adult Education in general. For example, despite the Workers' Educational Association Northern Region's keen commitment to renewing the accent on the worker/association aspect of their work, and Tyneside Cinema's broad audience base, formal evening classes tend to draw on students from a particular social and educational background. Their presuppositions about the methods of teaching and the structure and nature

of course content will not necessarily match the Cinema's overall policy aims. Traditionally the twenty-week adult course has meant breadth rather than depth with a different topic or film being covered each (or every other) week. As in literature courses, the assumption is that 'why' and 'how' the text should be studied is clear, each session merely offering a range of 'whats'. With film there is the additional problem that generally each text has to be viewed during the class itself which leaves even less time to challenge the students' 'common-sense' suppositions, structure viewing and create sufficient space for students to re-orientate themselves into a position where productive and critical study can begin. As tutors will know, negotiating with stereotypical responses such as 'I've never liked Oliver Reed...', 'It reminds me of the 1956 re-make of the classic John Ford...' or 'isn't it just a story about a bank robbery...' in the remaining half-hour after a film has been viewed is not easy, while it is rarely feasible or financially possible to retain a film for three or four weeks. It may be impractical even to re-run a section of the film for closer study.

Such factors make it difficult to get to grips in any thorough and detailed way with ideological or semiotic analyses of texts – though individual tutors will make what progress they can – and the institutional context of film production is in danger of becoming rather more of a factual prolegomena than an integral part of a theoretically based analysis. This must not be taken to imply that I imagine every course should resemble a postgraduate MA in film studies. Rather, evening courses need a radical re-organisation and re-orientation in order that new forms of group work on film texts can emerge where such issues are central not peripheral, and the motivated function of signifying elements is fundamental material for study.

In order to make such aims more feasible, it seems to me that the function of the classes both in relation to film and particular types of student need to be more closely examined. A part-time MA in Film Studies, possibly in association with a local higher education institution, would provide better and more structured study for those who wish to develop their knowledge and skills systematically (teachers moving into Media Studies, for example).

This would release some of the pressure on

adult classes to provide formal academic training in Film Studies and free them from particular teaching and learning methods. The classes could then be restructured as a *whole* (rather than being totally separate units as they are now) and over a period of time (rather than simply arising year by year from the same tutors). The other problem areas which need careful thought are how to avoid the 'club' which arises in classes held from year to year – 'what are we doing *this* year' – and how to cut the umbilical cord between particular tutors and regular students. These potentially damaging and limiting tendencies need to be used positively rather than being allowed to fester against change, alternative teaching and learning approaches. The sense of group identity, for example, can work productively if a class is structured around a group project as well as a (partially hidden) syllabus. Two ten-week terms of five seminar sessions followed by five group activity sessions which build on and utilise the skills learned earlier, in research, reporting back and specific work, is one way this might be done. Using a number of tutors on each course will build up new relationships between tutors and students and introduce different teaching personalities. It may also be necessary positively to discourage students attending the courses run by the same tutors in consecutive years or at least give new students priority in enrolment.

Some of these problems have been attacked by offering new types of courses for adults at the Cinema. 'Studying, Devising and Making Films', a course run during the day, had an initial enrolment of 22. Eleven students are currently unemployed, four are studying full-time on courses at the University, Polytechnic and College of Arts and Technology and there are a number of married women whose family commitments make evening classes impossible. Because the course was advertised through the Cinema's brochure and mailing (although the tutor's fees are paid by the University of Newcastle's Adult Education Department, with the cost of film hire being met by the BFI Education Department) a good mix of social and educational background has been achieved. The age range is wide – 17 to 60 – and discussion moves readily between textual and social questions.

The course is informal and works very much in and through the group workshop approach.

Emphasis is on discovery and improvisation. Film texts and critical enquiry are interwoven whenever possible and in line with the Cinema's overall policy, group consciousness-raising and the individual's development is considered a priority. The aim is not to produce film critics or makers but to use film texts to explore cultural and social attitudes, to dissect and rework their codes and narratives so that the process of representation is appropriated and utilised (not only or even primarily within this class) in the struggle against personal and social alienation. There is also a high level of participation and energy in this group, with considerable humour and enjoyment.

Initially the group discovered how this Cinema functions through meeting the staff and talking about their work. They then followed through the process whereby films are researched, contextualised in reviews, books and brochure-copy, etc. Such projects involved working together in small groups, discussing attitudes and ideas as well as writing and reporting back. A screening of a short advertisement on film enabled familiarisation with the technical side of projection and this was followed by close textual analysis of the text sequence-by-sequence on video.

This allowed work on image analysis and narrative, formal conventions, and social myth to develop while a television programme about the advertising campaign itself and the making of the (Levi Jeans) advertisement raised questions of intention, authorship, marketing strategies and socialisation. The remaining fifteen weeks of the class is to be divided between similar analyses of full-length films, group workshops on script improvisation and story-boarding, with the possibility of making a short video film in the future. These activities are based on ideas, conventions and the function of filmic elements discovered in the films studied – and those discussed from outside the class. A regular element for the group is the weekly deconstruction of one reel from a film on the Cinema's programme – generally without the sound but occasionally without the picture – which develops a range of skills and throws up a variety of formal problems and general issues. In terms of group dynamics it is a very enjoyable 'keep fit' exercise, but it also enables discussion to remain open-ended and ideas to be reworked and transposed outside the specific constraints of

the films from which they emerge. There are, of course, objections to this approach, but I see it as one useful strand in building up an active, critical approach to film which can extend the possibilities for students beyond formal understanding of individual texts and provide a productive strategy for viewing outside the class.

The 'Pop Video Group' attempts to stimulate similar work but centres it on a cultural artefact which is currently of special interest to many who would not find the study of film immediately attractive, nor, probably, enrol for a conventional Adult Education class. This group has met weekly since October and was set up after requests at a very well-attended lunchtime talk on the subject at the Cinema.

The study group has experimented with a number of different critical strategies to the popular music text, attempting to establish a morphology, to isolate the signs and codes of pop video language and to locate the texts within the mode of production of pop music both as a cultural artefact and a commodity. A lively exchange of views and ideas takes place and some members of the group have followed up theoretical approaches with detailed work (in press research, content analysis and so on). Because critical work with pop videos is relatively untrodden ground, 'conclusions' remain, inevitably, open and this may seem to some members of the group to mean the work has been 'something and nothing'. The problem is to find an approach that avoids the imposition of supposedly authoritative definitions but allows a sense of achievement—however temporary this may be. Producing a video and a study-pack are two possible ways to stimulate structured critical responses while still continuing to produce questions and problems which can be practically and theoretically explored. Specific tasks such as these may also require new members (with particular skills) to be sought for the group which will further extend the range of possibilities and personalities important in maintaining a lively group atmosphere.

Since late 1980 there have been monthly informal free lunchtime talks at the Cinema which have proved popular with regular cinema-goers and casual callers to the Cinema or coffee-shop, as well as providing a pleasant break for city workers. A very wide range of topics, media forms and film genres have been explored on these occasions and the subjects introduced by a

variety of speakers who are not necessarily engaged professionally in film production or education. Events have included 'Bias in the Media', by a regional television producer; 'Carrie', by a member of the BFI's staff; 'E.T.: Phenomenon or Phoney', by the author of this article; 'Images of the Sailor from Trafalgar to Fassbinder' by a postgraduate student at Newcastle University; and a video screening of *They Will Never Silence Us*, introduced by a member of the Commission for Human Rights in El Salvador. These events often pinpoint important issues around individual films or seasons in the Cinema's programme, comment on contemporary debates or deal with topics which are of general cultural importance. They provide a context for, or a challenge to, people's thinking and they are intended to point to ways in which the issues raised can be followed up within the Cinema's resource department or elsewhere.

In a similar way, the Cinema's day schools for adults form a further and more substantial contribution to the process of its educational work. These schools vary in approach and scope. The recent 'Cross-Dressing' event (May 1983), for example, broke new ground by raising issues that were controversial and important but generally neglected. These sessions (financially assisted by the BFI Education Department) involved a high level of both theoretical and textual analysis. And a Tyneside Cinema publication entitled *Changing Gear* is in progress—with contributions from Annette Kuhn, Gay Clifford, Penny Ashbrook and myself—which aims to extend this debate and reach beyond the work of the Cinema's day school itself.

Other days function more informally and build directly on participants' experience and understanding, challenging them to pursue the issues raised in further personal study or through a period of involvement with the Cinema. There were, for example, two day schools linked to the January/February 1984 Cinema season, 'Millions Like Us... Representations of the Working-Class in British Cinema'. The first, 'Sally, Cinderella and her Sisters', examined two Gracie Fields films from the season's programme (*Sally In Our Alley* and an extract from *Queen of Hearts*) and explored the representation of working-class women, the expectations of the narrative, and assumptions about the 'nature' of men and women. In the second session, more general

146 issues relating to the 'visibility' of working-class women in film, television and fiction, the relationship of these questions to contemporary society as well as the personal response of students were explored by the Tutor for Women's Studies at the WEA's Northern Region. The second day school, 'What A Picture: Versions Of Working-Class Life in the Thirties and Sixties', looked at literature, photography and film, illustrating and examining representations of class and sexuality. On both days the range of students was wide and discussion central. The timetable was full, lasting from ten in the morning to about four in the afternoon with coffee and lunch breaks – an event that was productive, stimulating and socially enjoyable. It is vital that students and tutors have an opportunity to get to know each other on these days – packed lunches are suggested to facilitate conversation and contact – so that inhibitions about 'academic' events can be broken down and the questions raised by the texts extended into personal and social attitudes. It is noticeable that those who enrol are not, largely, students from the continuing Adult courses. The day schools make provision for those unable to make a regular commitment and target audiences in relation to specific topics. Such provision could, I think, be usefully extended by offering weekend or summer schools on similar well-defined subject areas where the involvement of students could be extended and more detailed work undertaken.

Another new area is involvement in the training of shop stewards in the General Municipal Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union. Two day schools entitled 'The Media And You' have introduced the basic principles of media analysis, with workshop sessions on newspaper manufacture of news and detailed attention to the production and texts of TV news. Another day school organised in conjunction with GMBATU's Equal Rights Officer concentrated on the representations of women in advertisement and television soap opera and linked specific textual analysis with general social attitudes to women and career prospects at work.

In both cases the informal environment of the Cinema and the nature of the workshop approach were important factors in defusing concerned expectation about 'educational

activities'. Allowing peoples' experiences and prejudices to emerge – though not to pass unchallenged – in a friendly group atmosphere while still pursuing a strategy of analysis and understanding enables trades unionists to gain skills much needed on the shop floor and in their struggle for better opportunities, greater and more accurate representation. The relationship with GMBATU has proved fruitful and mutually instructive and led to their sponsorship of and involvement in the 'Millions Like Us' film season.

There has also been some educational work at Acklington Open Prison. Following an initial informal seminar on pop videos in 1983, which analysed notions of class and representations of women in Madness and Duran Duran videos, a short course has been undertaken by the Cinema at the prison in 1984. This is the first such course at the prison and it may be possible to develop this work. (The subjects covered are film genre, animation and television comedy.) At present, though, such work can make little impact on the prisoners' lives as a whole – although the sessions are always full of energy and discussion. This is largely because the prison organisation makes more than three consecutive meetings with the same students impossible. The location of the prison, too, is remote and public transport only nominal, which adds to organisational difficulties.

A great deal of work is attempted by the Cinema covering many different areas (I have not included, for example, the increasing amount of Media Studies work with teachers) each requiring different approaches and stimulating differing responses. The Cinema tries to work from where people *are* in terms of ideology, methodology and course content, though this varies a good deal in adult work. Thus its publicity and information attempt to attract enrolment by offering something recognisable as well as suggesting that different approaches to the material are to be examined. It has been my experience in adult teaching that winning acceptance for lively group exploration is the initial and most important hurdle: having established a relaxed but invigorating method of working, new ways of looking can be more readily assimilated. Early meetings, or the opening of one-day events, must therefore concentrate on establishing group interaction and

provide some framework, based on relevant material, whereby group members and tutors can get to know each other and start exploring aspects of the work ahead.

A survey of this sort may suggest a nose very close to the page. Much of the work is specific to its context but that is because, as my introductory paragraphs indicated, the Cinema tries to function as a whole. Programme notes, visits from film-makers or producers, the activity of the Film Festival are all part of the educational project, and teaching events interact

with these. A five year plan would, on paper, look impressive, but at present *why* we do things and *how* we do them seems as important as what, exactly, we undertake. The Cinema is very conscious of its aims and critically monitors its activity. Many groups in the community have not yet been reached in our adult work and the work we do continues to pose questions that are not yet being answered or to provide answers that have not yet been questioned satisfactorily. This is, therefore, offered only – though not simply – as an interim report.

... AT MAIDSTONE PRISON

KEITH SKINNER RECALLS AN UNUSUAL INITIATIVE IN FILM STUDIES

Film Studies in Maidstone Prison developed, flourished and was frustrated almost by accident.

I was involved in a traditional evening class (Spanish) at the prison where the attendance was increasingly erratic. This was partly due to the traditionally capricious attitude of many inmates towards evening classes (which seems inevitable) but the recent attraction of videos in the wings, ironically in view of later events, brought matters to a head. At the same time, a group of men approached the Education Officer and myself requesting General Studies in the evenings. This class began last summer, and, moving from one area of politics, the arts, sciences and society to another, it emerged that they and I shared an enthusiasm for and interest in the cinema.

During the summer break I went to Jim Cook of the British Film Institute's Education Department, whose support and generosity were the crucial factor in setting up a film studies course for the autumn. Even given the high motivation and breadth of knowledge shared by the group, the success of that term's course surprised me. Attendance was the maximum the small room would permit and consistently 100 per cent. As the course continued the atmosphere and relationship was increasingly one of a workshop where one idea set off a train of others, with an accumulation of contributions.

We concentrated on British films and began by looking at the treatment of social problems, leading specifically to the cinema's treatment of war by documentary and fiction. We compared, for example, *Western Approaches* with the postwar *The Cruel Sea*. Few had seen *A Matter of Life and Death* and we used this to begin a study of special effects, particularly in science fiction,

comparing Powell and Pressburger's treatment (especially of the celestial Court of Appeal, whose niceties were well appreciated) with Kubrick's innovations in *2001*. Not a detail was missed, and I frequently wished that we could freeze frame to clarify a point.

Our 16mm Bell and Howell has seen better days and was one of the problems which began to emerge. Another was time. The class had a maximum of 90 minutes and many films had to be returned only partly viewed and studied. One of the students wrote:

I feel that the length of time which we have for the class is a bit short as sometimes we only get to see half or three quarters of a film. When watching films in the past I never thought too much about the effects or the story line, but now I am, due to the General Studies class, taking more interest and noticing more about them.

The third problem was finance. The BFI, to our delight, sent more money and we turned to comedy for the second term. In particular, we traced the development of one actor's character portrayal: Peter Sellers as shop steward, prisoner and Dr Strangelove. But the money was soon gone, and it did not help that, on a very tight budget, we were frequently invoiced for a sum far greater than that which had been quoted by distributors when we were planning the film programmes.

There was a video in the Education Wing, however, and it became obvious that most of our problems—cost, holding over of films, freeze frame—could be solved by it. However, when I approached a video company in order to book in advance and arrange invoicing, I found that in

some cases they were quoting £25 for the hire of one video for 24 hours. In any case the matter was academic, because they would not supply us.

The reason, of course, is copyright. I have spent nearly three months trying to obtain permission to hire videos, but it seems impossible. Yet the environment of a closed prison is about as non-public as you could get. The course may be enjoyable, but the reason for showing the films is educational and not recreational. The intention of the Copyright Act was, presumably, to protect the film industry. What we are trying to do in no way conflicts with this, for a great deal of interest in the cinema has been fermented. Some of the students have continued to write about film and TV. One has recently undertaken a general account of the development of the film industry; another watching repeats of *The Prisoner* commented on

changes in television techniques and reflected that:

*It was most weird and most surprising to remember forgotten places and people. But to remember them and, at the same time, to watch that old **Prisoner** on the television had an interesting effect on me. For a few minutes I was taken out of the class, out of 1984... I was back in the early sixties. Funny to think that if, in those days, when I was watching **The Prisoner**, somehow I could have seen the future, I would never have believed that, one day, I would be the prisoner... for real.*

We had great ideas for the third term, but sadly the budget is exhausted and Film Studies has reverted to General Studies. I imply no criticism of the area, but I do regret the frustrating of enthusiasm and talent, and wonder what this unique group might have achieved.

... AT BRADFORD FILM THEATRE

JANEY WALKLIN DETAILS WORK IN PROGRESS

As organiser of the Adult Education activities at Bradford Film Theatre, I shall give a general overview of the work undertaken in this area and outline the background to the implementation of courses and activities. Detail on the progress of courses themselves is best brought into focus by those involved in the teaching¹. What follows is a survey of the AE provision, looking at two of the courses, with discussion on what I felt to be problematic, namely the integration of practical work in the daytime 'Unemployment and the Media' course, and the pedagogic strategies relating to this.

The launch of the Second Screen project at the Bradford Film Theatre in June 1983 offered an opportunity both to extend the limited educational activity and respond to the demand for an open-access/community-orientated exhibition facility. 'Unemployment and the Media' was the first weekly course offered, followed later in the month by a women's film studies course. In February 1984 a series of evening sessions on film and the British Labour Movement was organised. A commitment to educational programming on a number of levels has thus been an integral and developing aspect of the Second Screen activities since its opening.

The more formal structure of evening classes was adopted for introducing the women's film studies and Labour Movement courses. Both were organised in conjunction with Leeds University's Adult Education Centre in Bradford, the Department providing tutors' fees

and assistance with course publicity on the one hand, and the Bradford Film Theatre providing the venue, course organisation, publicity and material booking on the other. The 'Unemployment and the Media' course was organised with the same University's Pioneer Work (PW) project, with some additional finance from the British Film Institute. Pioneer Work was established in 1982/3 as an extension of the University's AE provision and has been concerned 'with the provision of AE courses free of charge, for educationally and socially disadvantaged groups in Bradford and Leeds, in particular the unemployed'². It seemed appropriate to start the daytime programme of educational activity within this inter-agency framework, given that there was an existing network of projects initiated by PW in the field of 'educational innovation within the liberal tradition of University Adult Education'. Although practical video courses had been started elsewhere by PW in conjunction with Local Authority Continuing Education departments (based mainly in community centres) the Second Screen course represented a new departure in its structure and emphasis on the integration of collective viewing and practical work. The facilities also allowed for more specialised and concentrated study of film and TV material, as well as related experimental work with (domestic format) video equipment.

In publicising the daytime course, a geographically wide audience was addressed through the usual network of libraries, unemployment centres, etc and by a one-day event on the themes and issues likely to arise through the subsequent weeks. The wide catchment was reflected in the constituency of attendance. All but one student were unemployed, the age range was between 20 and 60, some had degrees (from Electronics to Fine

¹ See Caroline Taylor, Course tutor, Report on 'Makers and Making: Women In Film', January 1984; and Glenn Morgan, Course tutor, Report on 'Unemployment and The Media', December 1983.

² "Pioneer Work" in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Leeds', Report by the Committee on Adult and Continuing Education, January 1984, Leeds University AE Department.

Art) and others had little or no formal educational qualifications. The higher percentage of students was male. The range of students' interests and reasons for attending the course was apparent in evaluating its success. The media viewing sessions, for example, generally promoted 'positive and easy-flowing discussion', although, because of the range of educational background, the material was felt by the tutor to have been better weighted initially towards mainstream and popular representations (which in fact it largely was – *Rupert Goes to Town*, Yorkshire Television, *The Boys from the Blackstuff*, BBC, *The Spongers*, BBC, etc), enabling a common ground for discussion from the outset. The ordering of material was seen to be crucial; for example, while the women's film studies tutor programmed *Women of the Rhondda* as an 'accessible' film, the daytime course tutor found it one of the least easy to present, and a film that should have been inserted later in the programme. The intention of the course was, however, two-fold: to examine the representations of unemployment in the media, in particular films and TV, from news coverage to dramas to documentary features, and to disentangle and reconstitute the forms of these representations through practical work. The objectives in introducing practical work may be compared with Bob Ferguson's observations on deconstructive media analysis in relation to work in Secondary Education:

*With practical film and video work it is possible to break the rules of normal production practice, without having had years of professional experience. This partly because most of those who are likely to be involved in such work will have spent hundreds or thousands of hours watching film and television. They can understand in a rather passive way most of what they see. Deconstruction is a means of activating the processes of consumption.*³

Glenn Morgan, who tutored the media viewing sessions at the Second Screen described the aims of the course:

The course was originally conceived as an attempt to show how the problem of unemployment was

*illustrated and constructed in the media, principally television and film. From an early stage, there was a commitment to making the course 'practical' as well as 'academic' in the sense of teaching students not only how to critically examine images in the media but also how to begin to construct their own images through learning about how to use video equipment. . . . The practical sessions began roughly five weeks into the ten week term (in order that people could establish some sort of common ground from which to begin).*⁴

Although it was intended that the work of the practical tutor was integral to the course, there is a demarcation in Glenn Morgan's view which separates the practical activity as non-'academic'. The practical element of the course was partly intended to instruct people in basic video-making, but not only as the technical means of producing images. It was hoped that the practical work would be an integral aspect in examining the object of study, and working through the representations viewed in the material screened. Glenn Morgan's appraisal of the practical as an option centred in the acquiring of video-making skills, skirts some of the pedagogic and structural problems of achieving an engagement with some of the practicalities of video-making, while at the same time constructing images informed by the study of mainstream representations – facilitating a 'line in' to progressive concepts of deconstructive work.

A problem resides in the original assumptions and notions of 'applying' practical work to viewing activity 'as a means of activating consumption' – and how this might, in fact, be effected by both tutors involved. As the practical work continued into February this year, its link with the course as a whole and its inter-disciplinary objective became somewhat tenuous. One reason was an influx of new students in January, who wanted technical training in the kind of video used (such provision is very limited in the region). This change in attendance literally side-tracked the practical project developed by the video tutor and original core of students. Without having had experience of the viewing sessions over a sustained period, with both tutors present, there was no reason for newcomers to share the expectations of the course. They expected a more technical content and the balance shifted away from the kind of practical enquiry initially aimed for. This shift of

³ 'Practical Work And Pedagogy', Bob Ferguson, *Screen Education* no 38, Spring 1981, p 47.

⁴ See Glenn Morgan, *op cit*.

emphasis can be explained in terms of the apparent needs of new students, but there are questions of teaching strategy raised by the development of practical work which bear some discussion. (There is also the question of whether new students should have been permitted to enter the course at this stage given the inevitably disruptive effect.)

The processes in play in the consumption of images (through hundreds or thousands of hours of 'passive viewing') are absorbed, 'inherent', learned, and encoded in the structuring of the dominant TV and film material used. The group-viewing practice of the course work aimed to disrupt or unlearn this process. However, practical experimentation with the forms that mainstream (and independent) makers utilise and 'realise', is not an activity that can assume or transpose onto itself the code-breaking analysis of progressive viewing, as a kind of recipe for 'counter' success.⁵ Work on 'stereotypes' or self-image is often held to be self-evidently progressive. While I agree with the objective of teaching cognitive development through practical work, the strategies for putting this into teaching practice are not necessarily straightforward or easy to negotiate. The idea of integrating practical work over-simplified the relationship between consumption and production of images: it should have emphasised the position of the student in viewing and producing images—i.e. that the viewer is 'active' in constructing messages in the viewing of material, and that the notion of intervening as consumer in the process of message construction is an important area for practical enquiry.

In considering these developments in the first daytime course, it is useful to compare the criteria for educational innovation in another Pioneer Work setting, which took as its objective practical video training and the issue of access. PW objectives are (of necessity) quite broadly directed, towards courses which will 'both provide disadvantaged *individuals* with the opportunity of achieving personal fulfilment via education, and enable disadvantaged *groups* to gain a fuller understanding via educational provision of their own position and the various ways in which it can be analysed within the context of the wider society'⁶. Within such a brief, each course is likely to reflect the different educational aims and conditions of the host organisation. In Leeds, for example, the PW

video activity has been situated in a community centre and is characterised by its aim to cultivate a collective practice in community video production. It also has an element of self-programming activity, working out of the centre. In commenting on the work there, the PW organiser notes that a cohesion developed out of the first group (started in 1983) as a result of a shared objective, the collective video project about the community centre's activities:

From the outset, my role as course organiser was to impose a dominant and overriding priority—a responsibility towards community interest in production. Within that we have attempted to provide a basis for enthusiastic individual, community and educational development through an examination of both the aesthetic and social implications of the medium. We consider it important to foster a critical awareness of the medium and its potential.⁷

The community centre base and a notion of what constitutes an independent video practice has conditioned the type of activity described by the organiser. It is interesting to see how the work there has developed in such a consistent manner, along the lines of an intervention in the Continuing Education institution (aided by PW), with the result that the 'self-programming' video group has secured new video equipment for the centre, through their consistent activity in production work. Yet the progress of the group suggests that too little importance is attached to the educational value of 'fostering a critical awareness of the medium'—and negotiating such notions in tackling what the 'social implications of the medium' might mean.

⁵ 'Although I would maintain that certain types of theorising have been important in shaping feminist film practice, the influence is rarely either one way or direct. In any case, any identifiable influences emerge as much from the ways in which films may be read as from the intentions of their makers.'—Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, p 159.

⁶ The Committee on Adult and Continuing Education, op cit.

⁷ Rob Imeson, 'Using Video In The Community—A Small Case Study', February 1984. How in fact this interrogation of the medium occurs and to what extent might be discussed further. Here I simply refer to the case study to point out different approaches under Pioneer Work, and how an institutional framing conditions the mode of operation of the course. See also 'Unemployed Adults and Education', *Bulletin of Social Policy* no 14, Autumn 1983.

As a base, the Second Screen performs a different function in relation to 'constructing an audience', in that it draws a variety of people from a number of localities. It is not community-based, although serving a number of communities (and centres) in the surrounding area. The Second Screen also has its bias towards exhibition rather than video-making *per se*, and practical work has a distinct relationship to the project, as an agent of critical study. The aim of 'fostering a critical awareness of the medium and its potential' is thus presented primarily within the context of the activity of viewing, with the practical experimentation ideally providing an integral function of this process. In attending a course at the Second Screen, a 'cinema' to all intents and purposes, students expect a certain 'cultural/entertainment vein', and an emphasis on approaches to the object of study. While personal experiences and local issues are by no means marginalised or held to be irrelevant inputs in AE work, practical initiatives are justified in claiming a 'critical distance' – educationally, in the structuring of the syllabus, and because the space itself contains (and is contained by) a particular set of possibilities and structural relations with the user, which would apply differently in a community centre, for example.

The subject of Unemployment and the Media might have appeared a contentious one inviting criticism for forcing experiential as opposed to analytical involvement with an 'emotive and depressing' subject. Unemployment is not a 'condition'/'problem' that can be distanced very far, or sliced off from its representations on or off the screen, especially when all the students share some experience of it. But the course aimed to examine precisely the structural relation of the fact of unemployment to its ideological manifestations in the media. This raised the possibility of discussing the 'crisis of naming' unemployment, the stigma, and the representations in the media which have provided figurative means of negotiating or side-stepping the political struggle. TV series such as *The Boys from the Blackstuff* have produced sets of images and heroes, the poetic realism of 'Yosser's Story' has forged a connection between the viewer's 'realm of vision and the ideal of truth'. The students examined the media treatment of those people disadvantaged through subsistence living, with the practical work

providing a means by which dominant forms could be experimented with. The emphasis of the course was on the work an audience might do collectively in examining mainstream representations of unemployment; in the practical work, the intention was not to reproduce the formal qualities of such material (the equipment was not capable of this anyway) but to enable students to approach their object of study with some knowledge and understanding of how the equipment related to the language and forms of particular representations.

The women's film studies course, 'Makers and Making: Women in Film' was an introductory short course held in the evenings, very well attended and sustained by students (33 women, two men). The course 'focussed on recent, mainly British, independent films with the aim of exploring... what kind of practice could constitute a feminist cinema'⁸. There is now no shortage of critical debate in film studies from a feminist standpoint. Indeed, the advancement in film studies of a critical praxis 'has largely been achieved through a Marxist-feminist perspective'⁹. To those students attending the course there seemed to be a common ground of acceptance even among those with no prior knowledge of the subject. The fact that the course appeared to be placed within the framework of women's issues was sufficient to engage their interest: 'Most had little knowledge of film studies and about 30% were motivated by the fact that it was specifically a women's course.'¹⁰ The popularity of the course, which though informal in presentation was situated in the framework of traditional AE classes, may be accounted for in a number of ways. There are few opportunities in the region, outside the Further Education establishments, for even a short period of study on cultural production and its relation to feminist film theory. The wide regional base, age range and mixture of students (including 50 per cent unemployed) reflected this and constituted a broad base of interest.¹¹

⁸ Caroline Taylor, *op cit*.

⁹ Barbara Klinger, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism Revisited: The Progressive Text', *Screen*, January 1984, vol 25 no 1, p 30.

¹⁰ Caroline Taylor, *op cit*.

¹¹ 'This seems to be a very rich area for study and I found a lot of benefits doing it in a group like this – it was well worth the journey from Leeds; a valuable contribution to my own awareness of film, and enjoyed by all I think.' – J Alexander, course student, January 1984.

Another reason for the popularity of the course may be that this area of study has benefited from an increased level of media exposure and (off-peak) popularisation (from 'women's page' news items to Channel Four's *Eleventh Hour* series). And unlike the daytime course, the tutor presented a clear view of the problematics constituting the methodological and critical approaches to the object of study. The area, though broadly defined as an introductory survey, was not subject to the pedagogic variability of the course on Unemployment and the Media. There was, on the part of the students, an expectation of critical distance with regard to the films (as texts) and a familiarity with the political implications for feminist practice in the cultural sphere. That students were willing to engage with the notion of cultural struggle via a feminist perspective, was borne out by the tutor: 'The students seemed to gain a great deal educationally from the course, in terms of introducing new and challenging ideas and being made conscious of the importance of film and video in forming those ideas.'¹² The film and video material examined often challenged the passivity encoded in dominant representations, so that, as viewing subjects, the students could consciously intervene in the processes of message construction.

The marginal increase in film and TV work of an experimental nature 'by and for women' (perhaps somewhat overstated by Laura Mulvey in 1979¹³) has ensured that some kind of 'women's perspective' has been presented more often than before. Feminism has intervened into the TV institution in a variety of guises, with off-peak audiences addressed by series such as Channel Four's *Pictures Of Women: Sexuality*. The relation between the collective address of the course 'audience' and the deconstruction through practical experimentation with dominant forms of representation had a resonance in the *Pictures of Women* project. The programmes were made to elicit a formal consciousness of the means of structuring material (the programme-makers shown in a position of critical distance by means of framings, graphics, control room shots, suggesting a sense of the power of reconstruction in process). The issues raised by the series were presented in a kind of critical emulsion rather than as theoretical absolutes, necessitating a variety of techniques and

experimental formats.

I mention this series in relation to both courses I have discussed, because although inserted into the institution 'Television' as opposed to Adult Education, it presented an educational challenge in its 'visible structuring' which aimed at critical distance as well as feminist partiality. Also apparent was the objective in cultivating a critically active audience response: disrupting the voyeur in the viewer. The kinds of strategies informing the series are well within the capability of a group in an AE setting; and the collective viewing process of students on the women's course did result in the kind of active response aimed for by such a series:

It was apparent throughout the course that film studies is not merely a way of showing films not seen in the dominant circuits, but by providing a context for a variety of films to be viewed, the whole meaning of some films shifts. The students emphasised the value of viewing films and videos in a group, which, if seen on TV out of a context, they might switch off.¹⁴

While the *Pictures Of Women* series negotiated the problem of its institutional context and potential absorption in the flow of TV programming, films such as *Jeanne Dielman* were programmed into the 'Makers and Making' course with some degree of care on the part of the tutor. Students on the course had been required to write deconstructions of the more formally avant garde films shown and, with this particular discipline of looking established, the 'finale film' by Akerman proved an 'enjoyable and fruitful experience for most people'. The length of the film was worked round by women who had childcare commitments, for example – and sitters and sandwiches were organised for the screening. This might sound parochial, yet the experience provides a note on the

¹² Caroline Taylor, op cit.

¹³ 'The future directions of 16mm and of experimental film are uncertain, but the conjuncture between their growth and the historic eruption of feminist politics is unprecedented in the history of the arts, there, at last, the demands of women can have a determining effect on aesthetics, as the work of feminist film theorists and film-makers gains strength and influence within the experimental sphere.' – Laura Mulvey, quoted in Lesley Stern, 'Feminism and Cinema Exchanges', *Screen*, Winter 1979/80, vol 20 nos 3/4, p 101.

¹⁴ Caroline Taylor, op cit.

'constitutive authority of the moment' with regard to the programming of this course and the context of the films' reception by this particular social audience.¹⁵ If the activity of viewing is conditional on the institutional framing of the experience, the collective and sustained nature of the women's film course enabled productive enquiry into a range of material. The presence of three experienced women film-makers on the course also gave the discussion an insight into what might constitute a feminist film practice.

A careful strategy for practical work on such courses needs to be implemented, so that all concerned are familiar with its educational objectives—these are of a different kind to the community centre model described earlier. An acquaintance with basic video techniques is a prerequisite, but it can all too easily dominate the activity—and appear the 'active' polarity in

the work, with viewing designated the passive. The quality of debate produced by collective spectatorship in 'Makers and Making' suggests that the traditional model of screening/discussion may have produced a more active engagement with the material.

The conditions for cultural production and experimentation in the medium of video are neglected or under-resourced in the region around Bradford, and the interest in practical work shown by students is an indication of the very limited access most men and women have to courses and workshops. This is a regional imbalance which cannot be redressed by the presentation of a few feminist 'auteurs' or purely technical courses on the 'Creative Use of (Domestic) Video', which merely seek to emulate professional standards. Instead, it seems more appropriate to continue practical work as an integral and progressive element in the growth of Adult Education provision at this venue—to enable students to interrogate the medium in its dominant usage, to refuse the production style and message construction presented via the media, as 'normal, desirable, transparent'.

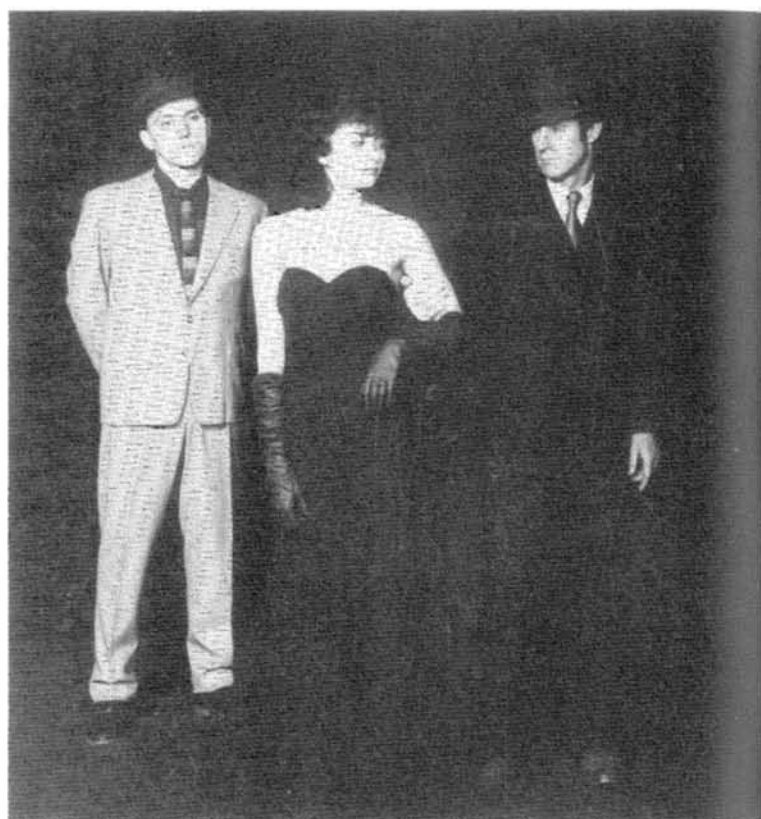
¹⁵ 'Social Audiences become spectators in the moment they engage in the processes and pleasures of meaning making attendant on watching a film or TV programme.... In taking part in the social act of consuming representations, a group of spectators becomes a social audience'. Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres', *Screen*, Jan/Feb 1984, vol 25 no 1, p 23.

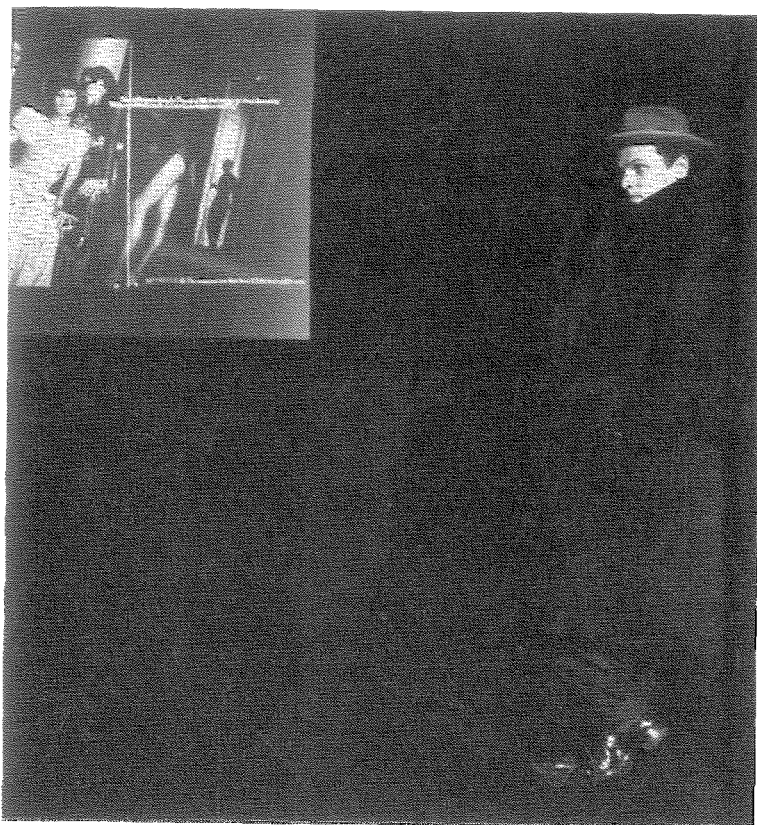
CORRECT DISTANCE

**PHOTO-TEXTS ON
FILM NOIR
BY MITRA TABRIZIAN**

'Johnny was right, gambling and women don't mix.'
For some time now his wife's flirtatious behaviour,
invisible to others, had betrayed itself to him.
She had 'accidentally' touched Johnny's thigh,
had leaned a little too close to him,
had smiled a little too warmly.
He was acutely sensitive to these signs
and knew how to interpret them:
'I don't love him, *she* loves him!'







he text in the advertisement set in above reads: "My colleagues from the Friends of Silk and your gown most distressing. Tell them what it is made of, make them happy as sandy." . . . Mitrelle . . . The sensuous new fibre from ICI, the inscrutable ones."



All her life she had been a successful writer and speaker.
 Yet after every public performance
 she felt intensely anxious:
 ‘Had she really done well?’
She looked to men for reassurance – seducing them.
 ‘I am Mildred’s rival, but fear her;
to escape my mother’s anger I become my father;
 to conceal the identity I have stolen
 I pose as a woman.’

(Thanks to Alberto Piovano, Frederique Lefort, Peter Sutherland, Mark Lewis and
Merlin John.)

CALL FOR PAPERS

A future issue of *Screen* is to be devoted to other cinemas, other criticisms. The issue will have a dual focus: it will include articles around non-dominant cinemas marginalised in terms of hegemonic and/or patriarchal structures of production, distribution and exhibition, as well as textual operations. It will also be interested in how such films are mediated and constructed within dominant cultures. Thus, articles might be on third world cinemas, structures of their reception in the first world, feminist cinema, revolutionary cinema, minority cultures, etc. What is the position of existing film theory in relation to such cinemas? Does it privilege dominant cinemas over others? Can existing film theory be stretched to cope with these cinemas or does it, by its nature, exclude them? If so, is it necessary to construct other theoretical practices? What would their relationship be to other cinemas? We invite submissions and/or ideas for these articles to be sent to *Screen*, c/o Jennifer Batchelor and Annette Kuhn, issue editors. Copy deadline is December 1, 1984.

Video: copy for an issue of *Screen* dealing with this area is requested by November 1, 1984.

Acting and Performance: the copy deadline for this issue of *Screen* has been extended to January 1, 1985.

m/f no 9

equality and inequality

Premenstrual Tension and the Law – Hilary Allen
Incomes Policies and Women's Wages – Jim Tomlinson
Translation – Michèle Le Doeuff on Women and Public Office
Translation – Moustafa Safouan on Men and Women
The Structures of Fantasy in Film – Elizabeth Cowie

Subscription for two issues: £4.00 inland £4.75 Europe £5.50 USA and elsewhere. Payable to m/f 24 Ellerdale Road, London NW3 6BB England

The University Film and Video Association

JOURNAL OF FILM AND VIDEO

Editors of the Journal

Editor

Patricia Erens

Associate Editors

Dudley Andrew

University of Iowa

Jeanne Thomas Allen

Temple University

Mitchell W. Block

University of Southern California

Lucy Fisher

University of Pittsburgh

Don Fredericksen

Cornell University

Douglas Gomery

University of Maryland

Gorham A. Kindem

University of North Carolina

Chapel Hill

Stuart M. Kaminsky

Northwestern University

Timothy J. Lyons

Southern Illinois University

Carbondale

Betsy A. McLane

Direct Cinema Limited

Richard Alan Nelson

University of Houston

Manjunata Pendakur

Northwestern University

Edward S. Small

University of Missouri

Columbia

Vivian Sobchack

University of California

Santa Cruz

Robert Stam

New York University

Robert W. Wagner

Ohio State University

Linda Williams

University of Illinois

at Chicago

Articles on film and video history, criticism, theory and aesthetics, the methodology of teaching film/video study and production, and innovative ways of conducting film/video production experiences. Also listings of current film/video books, book reviews, and a special section of college course outlines for media instructors.

Past issues of *The Journal* have been on:

Soap Opera and Melodrama

Independent American Narrative Filmmaking

New Spanish and Portuguese Cinema

Conference Programs 1982-1983

Future Issues will include:

Film and Video Aesthetics

Spectator Positioning & New Technologies

Screenwriting

Film History

Teaching Television

UFVA Monograph Series

The Glossary of Film Terms

Bibliography of Theses and Dissertations

Published quarterly by The University Film and Video Association

1984 Subscription Rates	United States	Foreign
1 Volume (4 Issues)	\$9.00	\$15.00
Single Copies	\$3.00	\$ 4.00

For subscription and other information write:

Journal of Film and Video
Rosary College
7900 West Division Street
River Forest, IL 60305

Please prepay orders with check or postal money orders.

©1984 UFV

University of London
DEPARTMENT OF EXTRA-MURAL STUDIES

CERTIFICATE IN TELEVISION STUDY

The Department is offering a three year part-time course in Television Study beginning in September 1984. Course 1, Structures, News and Fiction will be held at the Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London WC1, and at Goldsmiths' College, SE14. Course 2, Current Affairs, Documentary, Entertainment will be held at the Institute of Education. For further details either write to Mary Wood at the Extra-Mural Department, 26 Russell Square, WC1 or telephone 01-636 8000 ext 3839/3840

ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN
NATIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY
CONFERENCE
21-23 SEPTEMBER 1984

AT SHEFFIELD CITY POLYTECHNIC

For details and application forms
contact: Bushy Kelly,
19 Wood Terrace,
Bill Quay,
Gateshead.
NE10 0HG.
Tel. 0632/380713.

FAST FORWARD



207 LADBROKE GROVE, LONDON W10 6HQ

**01
960
1783**

**01
221
5219**

FAST FORWARD is a design partnership offering graphic design services to a wide variety of clients.

Their work falls into two categories: graphics for films & television & design in print.

For films & television **FAST FORWARD** design titles & other graphic sequences.

In print their work covers a wide range and includes books, magazines, symbols & posters.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

WILLIAM BODDY lives in New York and teaches Film and TV Studies. He recently contributed an essay on television criticism to the American Film Institute anthology, *Regarding Television*. . . . **SUSAN BOYD-BOWMAN** produces educational programmes for television. . . . **JOHN CAUGHIE** teaches Film and Television Studies at Glasgow University. . . . **CHRISTINE GERAGHTY** is a full-time Trade Union administrator and teaches an evening class in Film Studies. She is a member of the *Screen* Editorial Board. . . . **DOUGLAS GOMERY** teaches in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Maryland. . . . **ROBIN GUTCH** is an Assistant Producer in the BBC Community Programme Unit. . . . **IAN GREEN** teaches Film Studies at the Polytechnic of Central London and Saint Martin's School of Art. . . . **PHILIP HAYWARD** teaches Film and Communications at Little Ilford School. . . . **ANDREW HIGSON** is a lecturer in Film Studies at Leicester Polytechnic and is researching a Ph.D thesis on British cinema and discourses of realism. He is a member of the *Screen* Editorial Board. . . . **FRANK KRUTNIK** is preparing a doctoral thesis in Film Studies at the University of Kent. . . . **ANDY MEDHURST** has taught Film Studies at Warwick University and the University of East Anglia, and is one of the organisers of the Norwich Gays and Film Event. . . . **MITRA TABRIZIAN** is a part-time lecturer in Photography at the Polytechnic of Central London.